Dharma and Halacha

COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN HINDU-JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

EDITED BY
Ithamar Theodor AND
Yudit Kornberg Greenberg

Dharma and Halacha

STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

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For Daniel Sperber: Rabbi, Professor, and Scholar who pioneered the pursuit of dialogue and understanding between Hindus and Jews

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Introduction

Dharma and Halacha: Comparative Studies in Hindu-Jewish Philosophy and Religion

Yudit Kornberg Greenberg

I am writing this introduction on the eve of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel, the first visit by an Indian prime minister to the State of Israel. Indeed, this visit is of immense importance for the mutual benefits of Indian and Israeli politics and economics. Still, even amid great deal-makings, the cultural and spiritual ties that have linked the two ancient nations for millennia should not be forgotten. In the biblical Book of Esther, India is mentioned in reference to King Ahasuerus who reigned from Hodu (India) to Cush (Ethiopia). Tablets found in Babylonia serve as evidence of trade and other cultural interactions between Indians and Israelites (Chakravarti 2007; Katz 2007; Weinstein 2007; Marks 2007; Goitein and Friedman 2008). In later periods, we find references to trade with India in the Talmud and other Jewish texts. In Jewish Hellenistic writings such as those of Josephus Flavius and Philo of Alexandria, there are positive references to Indian philosophy; other thinkers such as Aristotle believed that Jews descended from Brahmins, and like the philosophers of Greece, they represent an elite intellectual community. In contemporary scholarship, ethnographic and historical studies of Indian Jewish communities by scholars such as Nathan Katz, Shalva Weil, Joan Roland, Barbara Johnson, and Yulia Egorova bring to light the distinctive character of Jewish communities in India, and the relationship between religious behavior and ethnic identity, and between religion and culture (Katz 2000; Chakravarti 2007; Weil 2002; Roland 1998; Johnson 2007; Egorova 2006).

In contemporary times, representatives of both traditions have been collaborating through the mediums of interreligious and academic encounters. In the past nine months alone, I participated in two transnational and interreligious events that brought together scholars and representatives of Hinduism and Judaism for dialogues. The first meeting took place in

Jerusalem during September 11 to 14, 2016. This meeting, titled "Asian Traditions, Contemporary Realities: A Meeting of Israel-Asia Faith Leaders," was co-sponsored by the Foreign Ministry Office, The World Council of Religious Leaders, and the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In March 2017, the India-Israel Academic Dialogues: Political and Cultural Crossings conference was held in Delhi, with delegates from Tel Aviv University, Brandies University, Rollins College, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Jindal Global University as well as officials from the Indian Parliament and the Israeli Embassy in Delhi, contributing to deepening the scholarship of Jewish history in India, as well as contemporary Indian-Israel cultural, economic, and political collaborations. Such growing relationships and collaborations between these two countries represent not only the last seventy years of freedom and democracy and twenty-five years of diplomatic ties, but also two ancient cultural and religious civilizations that have contributed such immense philosophical and religious texts as the Bhagavad-Gītā and the Hebrew Bible.

The 2016 interfaith meeting in Jerusalem, "Ancient Traditions, Contemporary Realities," was the first interreligious dialogue sponsored by the Israeli government, which invited delegates from multiple religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. The presentations ranged from the environmental crisis, women's rights, fundamentalism, and violence. The topics of environmental stewardship and our current ecological crisis were highlighted as the delegates shared examples from their religious teachings that support appreciation and respect for nature and biodiversity. In both the Hindu and Jewish traditions, there are precepts that guide humanity's responsibility of maintaining the well-being of the earth. In Hinduism, nature is a manifestation of divinity, and, therefore, humanity and the environment are understood as integrated, rather than existing in a hierarchical relationship to each other.

The above-mentioned conferences are indicative of the ever-growing relationship between India and Israel and stand on the shoulders of the 2007–2008 historic summits when Hindu and Jewish clergy and scholars met in Delhi (2007) and Israel (2008). These summits represent the first time that officially appointed delegations of Hindu and Jewish religious leaders met and produced declarations affirming common religious views, histories, and practices. A central theme in Hindu-Jewish dialogue is that unlike other traditions that are missionizing and, therefore, aim toward absorbing all cultures, the teachings and practices of Hinduism and Judaism are grounded in and aim to preserve the history, land, and language of the two ethno-religious groups and traditions.

During the first summit, the delegates articulated a declaration signifying a momentous and historic breakthrough, namely, the recognition by the Jewish

participants of the fundamental nature of the Hindu belief, and overturning the common Abrahamic theological view of Hinduism as idolatrous. The declaration of the 2007 summit was further elaborated at the 2008 summit in Jerusalem when the Jewish delegation concurred that Hindus accept One Supreme Being, and denied that the physical representations of deities used in worship are idols (Greenberg 2009; Goshen-Gottstein 2015; 2016). In 2009, in efforts to further the understanding between the two groups, another meeting took place in the United States, sponsored by the World Council of Religious Leaders and hosted by the American Jewish Committee, the Hindu American Foundation, and the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha (Greenberg 2014).

The significance of the 2007–2009 summits can be further appreciated considering existing scholarship in Indo-Judaic studies and the comparative study of Hinduism and Judaism. The key question that defines and animates interreligious dialogue as well as the academic study of comparative religion is: What do these traditions share, and what is gained from this comparison and dialogue?

The comparative studies of Hinduism and Judaism are the academic areas encompassing analytic categories such as ritual, and disciplines such as history, ethics, and theology. The revealed scriptures and thought systems known as Veda and Torah are teachings and interpretations by religious scholars and priests that shaped the beliefs and practices of their respective ethno-religious groups. These traditions accept the sacredness of Sanskrit and Hebrew, the holiness of the lands of India and Israel, and the transmission of religious identity through birth.

The Comparative Studies of Hinduisms and Judaisms Group was established over two decades ago at the American Academy of Religion, offering analytical categories through which South Asian and Judaic scholars delineate and explicate elements of the Hindu and Jewish traditions. At its inception, scholars such as Barbara Holdrege and Paul Morris, who founded this group at the American Academy of Religion, articulated their rationale in defining this academic study as providing an alternative to the Protestant Christian paradigm of comparative religion, which privileges certain categories of analysis such as belief, faith, and theology, and undermining others such as ritual (Holdrege 2007; 2013).

Barbara Holdrege's *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (1996) represents a comprehensive pioneering work in comparative religion whereby Veda and Torah are explicated and examined, not simply as "scripture," but as systems of thought, symbols, and meanings. Hananya Goodman's edited volume *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* (1994) is the first attempt by a group of scholars of Hinduism and Judaism to examine the cross-cultural affinities between these traditions. These essays explore the historical connections and

influences between the two cultures; highlight resonances of concepts and practices; and feature comparative themes such as Dharma and Halachah, Guru and Zaddik, and Tantric and Kabbalistic notions of union with the divine. Kathryn McClymond's *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (2008) challenges dominant scholarly theories of sacrifice that depict the center of religious worship as the annihilation of life. Vedic and biblical sacrificial rituals feature types of sacrifices without killing, such as the Vedic use of cow's milk, and the biblical employment of cereals into their respective sacrificial rituals. Analytic categories and themes such as these enable and further the comparative study of Hinduism and Judaism in particular, and the areas of comparative religion and theology in general (Brill 2010).

We owe much gratitude to these and other scholars who paved the path for our contribution to the still nascent field of the comparative studies of Hinduism and Judaism. *Dharma and Halacha: Comparative Studies in Hindu-Jewish Philosophy and Religion* is the first comprehensive collection of essays by leading scholars of Hinduism and Judaism offering a comparative analysis of common themes and issues that are central to both religious communities. The organization of the themes and chapters in the volume reinforces the character of this comparative project. The terms Dharma and Halacha, independently and in conjunction with each other, embody that which is equally unique and common to both traditions.

The Sanskrit *dharma* ("uphold," "support," "nourish") encompasses the religious and moral law that governs human conduct. Likewise, the Hebrew *halacha* ("go" or "walk") comprises the "way" a Jew is directed to behave in every aspect of life. Therefore, the book follows what in rabbinic parlance has been made into a slogan: נעשה ונשמע (literally, we will do and we will hear), representing the principle that links Hinduism and Judaism, namely, that the religious *act*, the performance of the *mitzvot* (commandments), including the moral and ritual actions or dharma are primary in these traditions. This does not diminish the significance of personal beliefs, philosophy, and theology; rather, these are shaped by, and follow the performative dimension—the daily practice of worship and other contemplative spiritual technologies.

The themes of sacrifice, holiness, and worship run through part I titled "Ritual and Sacrifice." The topics of the first three chapters set the stage for considering multiple aspects and dimensions of the volume including ancient and contemporary forms of religiosity; the elevation of a seemingly mundane act to an ecstatic experience of devotion and worship; holiness is dependent upon human's desire for it and requires great sacrifice and continued worship to sustain it; and the ways in which religious devotion is manifested in embodied experience. Focusing on purity laws and rituals serves to delineate the religio-legal parameters that operate in both traditions.

In chapter 1, "Image Worship and Sacrifice: Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and Theological Debate," Rachel Fell McDermott and Daniel F. Polish offer us a subject that would seem to encapsulate the starkest divide between the Hindu and Jewish traditions: worship of images in Hinduism, celebrating the diversity of God in a multiplicity of images in every home altar, temple, roadside shrine, car dashboard, and store wall, and the radically Jewish monotheistic tradition that forbids the representation of God in material form, even in the confines of the synagogue. The authors propose that the living Hindu tradition of today may provide a window into the ancient Jewish tradition of the First and Second Temple periods, and that certain historical circumstances present in the evolution of Judaism, but not of Hinduism, have caused the two religious traditions to diverge.

In comparing the ancient Jewish and Vedic rituals of sacrifice, it is interesting to note that both were to an invisible deity. Later, Jewish practice evolved from *avodah*—the practice of the Temple sacrifice, to the recollection of such practice—from lighting the fire to telling the story of how it was done, from the act of sacrifice to the invisible-imageless divine, to the imaginative storytelling, word-rich service into which Jews weave their prayers. Whereas Jews discontinued sacrifices (both animal and food) at the Temple, Hindus have continued to do both. Whereas Jewish worship transformed to a more contemplative one, Hindu religiosity evolved in reverse—image worship was a later development in Hindu rituals and followed more contemplative Vedic forms. In Hinduism, the goal of contemplation is realization of unity of *Brahman* and *atman*; in Judaism, the goal of ritual prayer is devotion to the God who is, in addition to being the only one true God, is also the God of History, who took the Jews out of Egypt. While prayer displaced and became the substitute for animal sacrifice, the imagery of God as warrior and king remains in the liturgy. This chapter presents the dialectic between the immanence of ritual and its critique and sublimation for the sake of preserving divine transcendence in the form of a cognitive or contemplative knowledge.

In chapter 2, Tracy Pintchman offers an ethnographic study of a modern-day Hindu American doctor/mystic who not only wants to create sacred space in Pontiac, Michigan—his new home in the diaspora but much more. He built, according to his statements, not only a majestic temple for the local Indian population but a divinely ordained space infused with enough Śakti to transform the entire world. In her chapter, "Śakti Garbha as Ark of the Covenant at an American Hindu Goddess Temple," the author presents Dr. G. Krishna Kumar's comparison of the Śakti Garbha to the Ark of the Covenant, a comparison that is suggestive on several levels. Like the Ark of the Covenant, which was the manifestation of God's physical presence on earth (known as the Shekinah), the Śakti Garbha is the embodiment of the Goddess Śakti. Aside from the resemblance of the physical form of the Ark and the Śakti

Garbha, both are believed to embody divine power. The presence of the Ark with the Israelites was credited for the miracles and victories won by the Israelites during their wanderings; the Shekinah is with the people in exile, similarly to the Śakti Garbha whose presence likewise but even more so serves to heal, and endows those who enter the Temple with love and peace; furthermore, it endows "world protection," even for those who do not believe. Not only is this a fascinating example of contemporary Hindu rituals with suggestive parallels between the Ark and the Śakti Garbha; even more compelling is the common notion of the divine presence in the world in both traditions. The gendering of both as the feminine, her power as nurturer and protector, and even the resemblance of the Sanskrit and Hebrew terms Śakti and Shekinah are of theological import and worthy of further study.

In chapter 3, "Working toward a More Perfect World: Hospitality and Domestic Practices in Indian and Jewish Normative Texts," Philippe Bornet examines social laws of proper behavior in everyday domestic life, and the role of religious authorities in Hinduism and Judaism in their efforts to create an ideal society. A clear example is the minute detail in proper behavior of guests and their hosts as delineated in both cultures. Concerns over purity are applied and embodied in both rabbinic and Brahmanical domestic practices such as food preparation and contact among persons at the table. In both communities, substituting domestic rituals for Temple sacrifices such as sharing religious scholarly knowledge in the household is likened to the sacrificial act done at the Temple. Such practices as accounted in their sacred texts endow an authoritative value to actions conducted in the domestic sphere, indicating a historic shift in the hierarchical and spiritual lives of these communities. Although priestly roles and sacrifices ended with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in contrast with the continuity of Hindu sacrificial rituals, one can still see the elevation of the symbolic space of the home and the spiritual role of householders in both traditions. The author offers several hypotheses that might explain the similarities between Brahmanical and rabbinical sets of domestic actions, by emphasizing the religious dynamics of their composition. Factors in the establishment of domestic rituals include competition with internal as well as external authorities in both Judaism or Brahmanism, ambiguity in the relations with non-priestly authorities, and historical changes related to priestly functions in both communities that engendered the shift from the primacy of the priestly roles and public worship, toward a more private, more egalitarian and domestic religious practice.

In part II of the volume, devoted to comparing ethical systems in both traditions, we continue to observe and study the overarching and common principle operating in both traditions—the manifold ways in which the sacred is embodied in the mundane. In this context, it is significant to acknowledge a pivotal development in contemporary Orthodox Jewish views toward animal

food. *Torat Chayim*, a progressive Orthodox rabbinic group, has recently issued a statement calling upon the broader Jewish community to consider the moral and spiritual dangers associated with meat consumption: "We encourage the community to question whether food prepared in this manner meets the reverence-for-life standard on which kashrut is founded or the ethical standard we require from agri-business . . . there is significant and unnatural pain caused toward animals during their raising and slaughter for human consumption. It behooves the Jewish community, indeed nations all over the world, to have spirited and respectful conversations about reducing meat intake and coming together to find solutions for this global concern."

Such an unprecedented statement by a group of Orthodox rabbis represents an ethical stance against meat consumption based on the principle of non-violence, *ahiṁsā*, long observed in the Dharma traditions of Hinduism and Jainism, among other Indian religions. Perhaps this statement reflects a new consciousness that, whether directly or indirectly, can be credited to ongoing formal and informal dialogues between Jews and representatives of Indian religions.

In chapter 4, "Dharma and Halacha: Reflections on Hindu and Jewish Ethics," Ithamar Theodor highlights the mystical dimension common to both Hindu and Jewish ethics as expressed in Kabbalistic and *bhakti* texts. Accordingly, ethics represent the lower stages of a ladder leading to holiness, mystical union, and the love of God. The ethical doctrine articulated by the Ramhal is grounded in the Kabbalistic doctrine of sublimating daily activities as a path for releasing the encaged sparks or souls from this material world and returning them to their divine origin; as such, elevation doesn't take place only through prayers; rather, throughout one's life and throughout one's daily activities. Viśvanātha's book offers an interpretation of the ancient and classic Bhagavad Gītā. Viśvanātha's commentary takes an approach quite like the Ramhal and highlights the doctrine of *karma-yoga.* This doctrine is similarly grounded in daily activities, specifically activities that are grounded in *dharma*, or prescribed duties; it considers daily activities to be a gate for liberation, in that any action could be gradually sublimated or purified.

A compelling point of engagement is the author's selection of two eighteenth century thinkers whose commentary on earlier texts seems to parallel each other in terms of notions such as intention, and the metaphor of a ladder. Both begin with the right action that is done with self-interest; next is ascent to the level of disinterested action, followed by the move upward the ladder to pure devotion to God with one's whole being in a state of absorption and love.

In chapter 5, Aaron Gross's topic, "Humane Subjects and Eating Animals: Comparing Implied Anthropologies in Jewish and Jain Dietary Practice" is focused on contemporary Conservative and Modern Orthodox

Jewish practices in America and contemporary Terapanthi Jain practices in India, and the principles underlying religiously acceptable food. The author illuminates how ontologies of "the human," or what it means to be humane, are bound up with ethical mandates as demonstrated in food rules. Despite the value of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and the prohibition against animal food in Jainism, both traditions share three views: (1) Human supremacy over other life forms. This is based on the Dharmic belief that only in human form, or sometimes only in the male human form, can a living being achieve *mokṣa* (liberation), (2) everyday living requires harm to other forms of life, and (3) the utmost that humans can do is limit violence by either refusing to eat animals or by restricting the consumption of animals. Following Derrida, the author concludes that both Judaism and Jainism manifest a sacrificial structure and a counter, anti-sacrificial structure that contribute to a definition of a humane subject.

In chapter 6, Purushottama Bilimoria addresses contemporary trends in animal rights/liberation movements that base their views primarily on moral-philosophical considerations with secular and legal sensitivities, rather than on religious or religion-informed philosophies. He aims to correct this and to bring into the discourse Hindu and Jewish thought that consider the challenges of mediating religious rituals, animal rights, and our scientific knowledge of the sentience of animals. He provides examples from biblical and Vedic literature to illustrate the contributions as well as the insufficient or inconsistent attention given to animals in these traditions. He asks for example, what is the significance of kosher laws of minimizing the pain of animals when the intended practice is for human benefits? What are their implications for moral thinking on animals? Do animals have any rights beyond being part of human rites? Should we talk of human *rites*, rather than animal *rights*? The Hindu sages considered the cow as the personification of motherhood, fertility, and liberty. The cow was compared to the goddesses such as *Pṛṣṇi*, *Āditi*, and *Uṣās*. At the same time, in the early Vedic period, the cow was killed for sacrifice as the main offering (*havis)*. Still, the killing of animals and their distribution otherwise was part of a larger hermeneutic of the harmony of the human life-world with the natural forces because it was seen to have such a resemblance; and this earthly "good" might well be sufficient to please the gods who would return rain and calves. In later texts, the goal of renouncing the world led to the development of *ahiṃsā* (noninjury) in dharmic traditions and nonviolent sacrifices in which pulses, cereals, and ghee were substituted for animals. In contemporary times, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's teachings became most influential regarding vegetarianism, not just as a religious principle, but as a moral duty, reflected in modern-day animal liberation/rights thinking. The author bolsters his critique of animal sacrifice and consumption by referring to Peter Singer's argument whereby the morality

of actions should not be determined exclusively in terms of human interests; rather, since animals indisputably can feel pain and pleasure (i.e., they have sentience), it would be wrong to intentionally cause them suffering.

In chapter 7, Shoshana Razel Gordon Guedalia juxtaposes Jewish Halachic and Hindu Dharmaśāstric literature pertaining to the marriageability of widows. In her chapter titled, "Lethal Wives and Impure Widows: The Widow Marriage Taboo in Jewish and Hindu Law and Lore," she delineates the religio-legal parameters of this issue in each tradition. Her objectives are to shed light upon the accumulation of traditional layers of attitudes and taboos, and to demonstrate the hermeneutic tools used to distinguish taboo from scriptural law. In her account, she compares biblical and Jewish law whereby the high priest is barred from marrying a widow, with the Hindu priestly class—the Brahmins—who cannot marry widows. This parallel suggests a common perspective operating in both communities, namely, the need for priests to maintain the most rigorous state of purity required to perform specific priestly roles, and the level of impurity in a widow, which prohibits her marriage to a priest.

Beyond the practical religio-legal need for barring widow marriage from certain individuals, both textual traditions—Halachic and Śāstric—as evolved over history, display layers of accumulated attitudes that result in worsening of specific taboos. "Impure widow" practicum yields "lethal wife" taboo. The Talmud cites a tradition whereby a twice- or thrice-widowed woman is deemed a risk to men she marries—due to physical malady or astrological inauspiciousness—and therefore should not be married. Similarly, as Dharmaśāstric literature evolves, increasing emphasis is placed upon the culpability of widows for their husband's death—due to insufficient nurturing capacity, to infractions in past incarnations, or to astrological inauspiciousness. Legal codes and manuals subject widows to a life of ascetic privation, lest they harm the metaphysical state of the deceased. Ascetic widowhood gives way to yet another, far more horrible practice of *sati*—widow burning alongside her husband's body. While this extreme legal state of the widow is unique to Dharmaśāstric literature, we see that in both traditions, religio-legal scholars challenged these taboos, deploying legal sources to distinguish law from taboo. The author examines in parallel the legal methodologies used by twelfth-century Andalusian Moses Maimonides and nineteenth-century Bengali Ishvarchandra Vidyāsāgar, who sought to free women from the chains of the widow marriage taboo.

In part III of the volume, authors have addressed topics related to spiritual leadership, and textual metaphors for mystical and visionary experiences in Hinduism and Judaism. In chapter 8, "The Guru and the Zaddik and the Testimony of the Holy Ones," Thomas Forsthoefel examines the phenomenon of religious virtuosi, whether saints, sages, shamans, or monks, and focuses

on the roles of the guru and the zaddik in Hinduism and Judaism. As phenomena in the history of religions, both roles have complex and differentiated meanings and development that are internal to their traditions. Both the guru and zaddik express a sacramental dimension in their roles as spiritual teachers; in fact, the guru and zaddik become a sacrament themselves, that is, a visible sign of an invisible reality, namely, the presence of God. The author considers the structure, meaning, and scope of these roles in esoteric Hinduism and Judaism, identifies points of convergence and divergence, and sees in each the power of testimony expressed in the lives of the holy ones.

Broadly speaking, both the Indian guru and the Hasidic zaddik facilitate access of their devotees to the divine. Both enable the achievement of knowledge of God through acts of devotion. In relating the guru to other aspects of Hindu practice, we may speak of the guru as the vehicle to attain proximity to God by replacing the spiritual technology of sacrifice. In this sense, the zaddik and the guru replace the role of the priests in their communities. The main difference is that in Hindu theology, the telos of liberation is the realization of the identity of the *Ātman* and the *Brahman*. Therefore, the guru's identification with divinity is not controversial; the guru is an embodiment of the divine as both the Upanishads and the twentieth-century Ramana Maharishi affirm. The zaddik, however, while a charismatic leader, is at most a spiritual virtuoso who may possess supernatural powers and serve as an intermediary between the lay followers and God. But the notion of divine incarnation in a human being is antithetical to Jewish theology. The most persuasive aspect of the comparison between the zaddik and the guru is the spiritual methodologies bestowed by both upon their followers and the devotees' acts of devotion to their teachers. These are captured in the notion of "cleaving," the psychology of dependence, spiritual transmission in the form of the teacher laying of the hands, or *śaktipat* in tantric yoga, or other techniques described by Luria's teacher.

In chapter 9, "Reading Eros, Sacred Place, and Divine Love in the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim," Yudit K. Greenberg focuses on erotic love as the leitmotif that characterizes two of the best works of poetry ever produced, the twelfth-century Gītāgovinda and the biblical Shir Ha-Shirim (Song of Songs). Erotic representations of the divine occupy a pivotal place in religious myths, poetry, liturgy, and theology cross-culturally. Greenberg highlights that the Song of Songs has been the most quoted biblical book, inspiring a plethora of literature, theology, liturgy, and art in Judaism as well as in Christian traditions. One of the most important works in Indian literature and a source of religious inspiration in both medieval and contemporary Vaiṣṇavism, the Gītāgovinda offers a paradigm of *viraha* (absence or separation), and erotic *rasa* (mood or emotion), particularly applicable to imagining Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as lovers, representing the human soul on its

tumultuous journey toward union with the divine. It is not surprising that the Gītāgovinda has been claimed as the Indian "Song of Songs" (Arnold 1994; Siegel 1978; Greenberg 2013; Jayadeva 1977).

The verses of these songs embody and represent manifold cultural tropes. In this way, they contribute to the richness of the cross-cultural study of the languages of love and desire. While there are many compelling resemblances between the two poems that are worthy of examination, the author chooses to focus on the role that imagery from the natural world plays in depicting the physical beauty of the lovers and their sexual desire. Each image of flora, fauna, and aromas, as well as references to geographic locations, has its own history and meaning within the Vaisnava and biblical traditions. The river Yamuna, the forest in Vrindavan, the hills of Jerusalem—convey notions of sacred place in their respective traditions. Furthermore, the author emphasizes distinct differences pertaining to overt and suggestive languages of erotic love in these songs, and reflects on the implications of the rhythms of separation and union in the Gītāgovinda and the Song of Songs for their respective theologies.

In chapter 10, Paul C. Martin explores the depictions of the divine in the mystical schools of the Kabbalah and Kashmir Śaivism. He posits a parallel in the aesthetic experience that the practitioners of both traditions articulate in their writings, representing a similar affective and cognitive state. Kabbalistic and tantric texts provide aesthetic conceptions of the beauty and splendor of the divine space as the mystic practitioners experience it. While realizing that the scope of God is without end or unsurpassable (*ein sof* or *anuttara*), the kabbalists and yogis nevertheless imagine the landscape of heaven, with allusions to liquid and light. The kabbalists in the Zohar are called the wise ones who shine and radiate, for this is their primary leitmotif. In the Śiva Sūtra, it is asserted that the yogi fundamentally shares in that light of universal consciousness, which is called Śiva. Applying concepts from aesthetics and the philosophy of art, the author illuminates the correlative ways in which the idea of God is rendered in these traditions, suggesting that Kabbalah and Tantra *represent* God through aesthetic properties such as color and shape.

In chapter 11, Daniel Sperber compares elements in the names of God in Hinduism and Judaism. By focusing on AUM and the Tetragrammaton, he presents a structuralist parallelism between the holiest names of God in both traditions. In both cases, the names of God convey divine timelessness represented in their ineffability. In Jewish thought, it is YHVH, the four-lettered, unpronounced *tetragrammaton,* representing the infinity of God. According to Mishnah Yomah 6:2, during the Temple period, the high priest, upon entering the innermost sanctum of the Temple on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), would pronounce it out loud, and all who heard him utter it would fall on their faces in prostration. Since then, YHVH was replaced

by the term *Ha-Shem*, literally "The Name," which came to be used as the standard way of referring to "God." In Indian thought, the most holy name of Brahman is AUM, invoking limitlessness. The author explains that AUM is also a *tetragrammaton*, with the last element being *Amātra*, a non-element signifying silence. This fourth element is ineffable, unutterable, non-sound element of eternal silence that comprises its *tetragrammatorial* character. Thus, he ascertains specific parallels between the two names of the divine signifying timelessness and ineffability. This chapter then contributes to the comparative study of the mystical elements of "God language" in Hinduism and Judaism.

In the epilogue, Barbara A. Holdrege offers a retrospective on Hindu-Jewish encounters, mapping both historical and recent academic initiatives and collaborations. In her own scholarship, she has emphasized the comparative study of religion, and has interrogated the Eurocentric and Protestant Christian paradigms that have dominated the field. In her chapter, she addresses the scholarship of Indo-Judaic studies, especially that of Ranabir Chakravarti, Nathan Katz, Chaim Rabin, Brian Weinstein, and Richard Marks who have written extensively on trade contacts and cultural and religious encounters between Indian and Jewish communities from 1000 BCE to 1300 CE. The author also refers to Yulia Egorova and Nathan Katz who have written about Indian perceptions of Jews, and about Indian Jewish communities in modernity. She summarizes the collaborative work of the Comparative Studies of Hinduisms and Judaisms Group at the American Academy of Religion, and reflects on her work emphasizing the ethno-cultural and embodied characteristics of Hindu and Jewish communities. In this context, she highlights the comparative work of Kathryn McClymond on Vedic and Jewish constructions of sacrifice, and concludes with a summary of the Hindu-Jewish summits of 2007–2008.

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Part I

RITUAL AND SACRIFICE

Chapter 1

Image Worship and Sacrifice

Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and Theological Debate

Rachel Fell McDermott and Daniel F. Polish

Two years in a row, 2007–2008, a historic "Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit" met under the auspices of the World Council of Religious Leaders—first in Delhi and, then the following year, in Jerusalem.[1] The Summit was attended by a Jewish delegation representing the then Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yona Metzger (b. 1953; stepped down in 2013), and a Hindu body, the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, led by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930–2015). This Summit was unusual in that it was not motivated by political exigency. It began in 2007 with trying to identify what Jews and Hindus share—the notion of priesthood, the opposition of purity and impurity, legal codes, dietary laws, the lack of proselytization, the favoring of orthopraxy over orthodoxy, devotion to a motherland, and the desire to combat terrorism and secularism.

By the second Summit, and the nine-point Declaration that followed, the delegates were willing to go further: to find commonality where there was once an assumed, irreconcilable difference. Indeed, point number two broached the potentially inconceivable: "It is recognized that the One Supreme Being, both in its formless and manifest aspects, has been worshipped by Hindus over the millennia. This does not mean that Hindus worship 'gods' and 'idols.' The Hindu relates to only the One Supreme Being when he/she prays to a particular manifestation."[2] This astounding claim—that the Hindu is actually, in essence, a monotheist—was believed vital to any sort of sustained dialogical relationship between Jew and Hindu. For Hindus, the admission by Jews (and hence potentially by other monotheistic traditions) that they are not idolators wipes out centuries of calumny and gains them the legitimation needed for dialogue. For Jews, who may not, halachically, get close to non-monotheists, finding that Hindus worship the One Supreme Being is a *sine qua non* of further engagement. Michael Bender, who interviewed members of both

delegations, found that prominent Hindus from various areas in India were unanimous in their denials of Hindu idolatry. Said His Holiness Sri Swami Viditatmanandaji, of Arsha Vidya, Ahmedabad, "The Hindus are described as idolaters and have been looked down upon and denounced. So we seek to offer some clarification about the worship practices of the Hindus. . . . Hindus don't worship idols, but worship god, and invoke god in forms. This is based on the teaching that god is all-pervasive. . . . Therefore, we seek a sympathetic understanding on the part of other religious leaders to not dismiss us as idolaters" ("First Hindu-Jewish Leaders Summit Report"). The members of the Jewish delegation were apparently surprised by these assertions, but eventually accepted them (Bender 2014).

This chapter extends the theme of what the Declaration called "particular manifestations"—that is, images. Apart from surprise and acknowledgment, therefore, that "you Hindus have what we Jews have long had," is there any way in which Jews' understanding of their own history and theology can be challenged by the Hindu material, and Hindus' understanding challenged by the Jewish material? We start with an overview of normative Jewish understandings of images, look at what Hindus claim about images, and then return to ask what the Hindu and Jewish perspectives might illuminate in each other.

THE UNEQUIVOCAL SINGULARITY OF THE JEWISH GOD

Given its role as the foundational text of Jewish religion, the Bible has surprisingly little to say propositionally about the nature of God, and it includes no creedal formulation. But the evolution of Biblical thought culminates in a fundamental understanding: the absolute singularity of God.[3] While the heavens of the Mesopotamians were populated by a host of divine beings, the gods of the Egyptians were manifold, Canaanite deities had consorts, and Persian deities were a dyad, the God of the Hebrews exists in solitude. This theme of the Oneness of God undergirds the conceptual universe of the rabbis and all subsequent Jewish thought.

Another of the attributes implicit in the Biblical and later Jewish understandings of God is God's incorporeality. God has no physical, tangible qualities, no way to be represented or described. As expressed in the words of the *Yigdal* (*The Authorized Daily Prayer Book* 1960, 6–7), composed in the fourteenth century but based on a formulation by Moses Maimonides in the twelfth[4]: "He has no bodily form, and He has no body." Still, it is not altogether correct to assert that the Bible is devoid of physical representations of God, for God is portrayed as walking, seeing, hearing, remembering, and,

most frequently, speaking. Allusion is made to God's ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet.[5] The rabbis are, at times, given to a remythologization of Judaism, leading to even greater graphic representation. In a representative selection, one of the rabbis depicts his encounter with God:

> Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha says, "I once entered into the innermost part [of the Temple] to offer incense and saw the Lord of Hosts seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me, 'Ishmael My son, bless Me.' And He nodded to me with His head." (B Talmud Brachot 7a)

In the same tractate the rabbis discourse on God wrapping tefillin/phylacteries on His arm (Brachot 6a). Nevertheless, despite these more unconventional perceptions, the overwhelming norm is the affirmation of God's absolute incorporeality. This position is starkly presented by Maimonides: "[He who] believes that there are two gods, or that He is a body, or that He is subject to affections; or again that he ascribes to God some deficiency or other. Such a man is indubitably more blameworthy than a worshipper of idols" (Maimonides 1963, 84).

The Bible is also commonly assumed to be unequivocal in its denunciation of the use of images in worship. While this is the overwhelming consensus, the overall presentation is somewhat more nuanced. The complexity of the Bible's position is exemplified in an examination of the second of the ten commandments, as reported in Exodus 20:4–5 and Deuteronomy 5:8–10:

> You shall not make for yourselves a graven image or any manner of likeness of anything that is the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow to them nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am an impassioned God.

What precisely is it that is being proscribed in this commandment? Some interpreters argue that God is prohibiting the graphic depiction of God's own self.[6] The God of the Jews was to remain, as put explicitly in the New Testament, "invisible" (Colossians 1:15). The more conventional understanding is that what is prohibited in the second commandment is the worship of images of any other deity or deities. This more familiar interpretation of the verse seems to be corroborated in verses from the Books of Deuteronomy (4:15–20, 23–24) and Leviticus: "Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I the Lord am your God" (Leviticus 19:4).[7]

As one can surmise by the long history of graphic arts in Jewish life, including the use of graphic arts for religious purposes,[8] the second commandment is not a unilateral prohibition against the representation of anything in the world of nature. By contrast, the verses just cited, properly understood, support the understanding that what is proscribed is not the

creation of images, but the worship of such images in place of the worship of the God of Israel.[9]

One Jewish elaboration on this theme is the idea that even the act of describing or talking about God puts us in jeopardy of creating a "false image" that takes the place of God's reality. It is this concern that lay behind Moses Maimonides's well-known formulation of the *Via Negativa*: we can ascribe no positive attributes to God. Instead we can speak only in terms of what God is not, contenting ourselves with paring away false conceptions (Maimonides 1963, 134).

Included in the liturgy of the Jewish worship service, at numerous points but most pointedly at the conclusion, is the prayer called the Kaddish/doxology:

> Blessed, praised and glorified, exalted, extolled and honored, magnified and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He; though He be high above all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations, which can be uttered in the world.

It is as if the closing words of the service were admonishing us not to imagine that we had captured a literal image of God or related to God in God's fullness. The God of our imaginings ought not to become an idol for us.

THE EXUBERANT DIVERSITY OF HINDU GODS—AND CLAIMS OF THEIR UNDERLYING UNITY

Although the polytheistic Hindu is a common stereotype, the actual history of image worship[10] in the subcontinent demonstrates an early ambivalence toward the conjunction of divine transcendence and divine accessibility in a particular physical locus. Hindu image-worship may possibly be traced back to the Kuṣāṇa era (second century CE), but the earliest temples for the installation of images do not appear until the Gupta era of the early fifth century, in north India. Such veneration of icons or material representations was in noted contrast to the earlier Vedic sacrificial cult (early first millennium BCE), in which sacrifices were offered to invisible, disembodied deities who were represented, if at all, in aniconic forms such as stones, natural symbols, or earthen mounds. It also presented a sharp departure from the approach of the Upaniṣadic texts (eighth to fifth centuries BCE), in which the formless Absolute was posited as the ground of divine being. It now appears that, contra earlier theories positing some sort of Brahmanical cooption and acceptance of a "popular" image-venerating movement from below (Tarabout 2004, 57–84), the impetus may have derived from a new devotionalism and

immanent theology derived from a Brahmanical milieu itself, giving rise to conflict and debate.[11] Indeed, as priests and interpreters of religious texts, Brahmans seem to have been deeply ambivalent about image worship in the early centuries of the Common Era (Davis 2000, 107–133). Today, however, image-worship is normative for most Hindus, in spite of its slow—and uneven—acceptance.

While there is an almost infinite possible range of divine forms in the Hindu tradition, it is nevertheless true that diversity is only half the story. In a famous dialogue from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.9.1–10), a sage named Yājñavalkya is being questioned about the nature of divinity. "Just how many gods are there, Yājñavalkya?" asks his conversation partner. "Three thousand three hundred and six," is his reply. "And who are those gods?" Yājñavalkya enumerates them, and his partner challenges him to be more precise. Soon the number of gods decreases: there are really only six, then three, then two, then one and a half, and then one. Multiplicity, properly understood, can be reduced to unity (Olivelle 1996, 46–47). Indeed, there are many methods through which "the many" and "the one" are married by iconodules, or iconophiles, in the Hindu tradition. Seeming diversity can be undercut by (1) the use of abstract, generic designations, like Īśvara (the Lord), Bhagavān (God), Prabhu (Lord), Brahman (Absolute Being beyond all names and forms), and Śakti (all-pervading energy); (2) the assertion that the multiplicity of our world, which includes the numerous gods, is the *saguṇa*, "with form" aspect of the *nirguṇa*, "without form" Brahman, or Absolute;[12] (3) the theological belief that the multitudinous expressiveness of God is a celebration of the grace of the divine, who takes earthly forms to aid his devotees in their search for him; (4) the recourse to narratives about the gods, in which deities are related to or become one another, such as in the sixth century "Devī-Māhātmya" section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, where Pārvatī gives form to Durgā, who emits Kālī from her forehead;[13] and (5) iconographic expression through images that are both iconic and aniconic. Śiva's unadorned *liṅga* is an abstract manifestation of his inexhaustible potency; when decorated with faces, eyes, or headdresses, however, one gets a sense for the personality of the Lord. The formless is blended with just enough form to remind the viewer of the power beyond the material image.[14]

It is important to remember that although image worship is central to elite and popular Hinduism, and has been so for nearly two thousand years, not all Hindus have approved of it, and those who have criticized it might very well agree with the Rabbinic and Maimonidean positions articulated above. Woven throughout one of the oldest Upaniṣads is a refrain concerning the ineffability of the divine:

> About this self (*ātman*) one can only say "not -, not -." He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped. He is undecaying, for he is not subject to decay. He has nothing sticking to him, for he does not stick to anything. He is not bound; yet he neither trembles in fear nor suffers injury." (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.2.4, in Olivelle 1996, 57)

This is an apophatic way of describing Ultimate Reality, in negatives, like the Jewish *Via Negativa*: one tries to strip away all false ideas about God, all limiting descriptors. Following upon the insights of such seminal, revealed texts, some Hindu philosophers have decried as a lower form of understanding any dualism or multiplicity claimed for the divine.[15] The nineteenth-century Hindu monk-missionary Swami Vivekananda (1862–1901) put it this way: people who feel the need for images are no more than beginners; they are in the "kindergartens of religion," and need to grow up by experiencing in meditation the truth of ultimate divine unity.[16]

Although many of the most famous saints of the Hindu religious tradition have been avowed devotees of Hindu deities, many other devotionally minded Hindus have abandoned ritual and image worship. They too criticize images as a lower form of spiritual practice, not because of some monistic vision in which distinctions disappear but because they feel ritual to be empty and not conducive to the nurturing of true love. Says Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya, an early nineteenth century Goddess-worshipping poet from Bengal:

> External rituals mean nothing
> when the Goddess Filled with Brahman
> is roused in your heart.
> If you think on the Unthinkable,
> will anything else come to mind? (McDermott 2001, 100)

Drawing upon both of these earlier denials of image worship, and reacting to the Western dismissal of Hinduism by Christian missionaries for its "barbaric," "superstitious" nature, certain Hindus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in the Panjab, Maharashtra, and Bengal, formed anti-idolatry societies in which they emphasized the worship of the One, formless God. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), founder of the Ārya Samāj, was one such. An early childhood experience, in which he saw a mouse climb all over the Śiva *liṅga* in the temple, made him conclude that it was "impossible to reconcile . . . the idea of an omnipotent, living god, with this idol which allows the mice to run over his body and thus suffers his image to be polluted without the slightest protest."[17]

The Summits in Delhi and Jerusalem, therefore, were modern-day heirs of the views both that theological diversity is not ultimately what Hindu religiosity implies and that idolatry—if such really exists among Hindus—should

be attacked and wiped out. Neither of these views is necessarily normatively "Hindu," but they have strong backing among spokespeople for the tradition in their encounters with other religious communities.

DIFFERENTLY MOTIVATED, DIFFERENTLY CHALLENGED

In light of what we now understand about Jewish monotheism and Hindu image worship, we conclude by wondering how one could deepen the sort of rapprochement that the delegations achieved at the Delhi and Jerusalem Summits. We make two suggestions, one for each side of the dialogue.

First, in seeking such a heightening of contact, we are joining with scholars of Judaism, such as Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Alan Brill, and others,[18] who have very thoughtfully explored the history of Jewish thinking about idolatry, or—as the term became articulated in the post-Biblical period—Avoda Zara, the foreign worship of an alien God. In his *Same God, Other God: Judaism, Hinduism, and the Problem of Idolatry* (2016), Goshen-Gottstein exhorts his Jewish readers not simply to assume Hinduism to be Avoda Zara as a self-evident fact; there are multiple Hindu schools, movements, and spiritual centers, each of which may have a different relationship to images. Moreover, Avoda Zara is a legal, Halachic category formulated in the Rabbinic period to place a wedge between the Jewish community and outsiders, through "scorn, mockery, and contempt . . . exclusion and delegitimation" (Goshen-Gottstein 2016, 25)—in a sense, a reverse mockery of those who misunderstood Jewish theological claims. *Same God, Other God* covers a tremendous amount of theological, intellectual, and historical ground we cannot summarize or repeat here; in addition to Goshen-Gottstein's work to stretch, and complexify, the concept of Avoda Zara, what we find exemplary is his insistence that one cannot make an argument about Hindus that does an injustice, or a violation, to their self-understanding. Furthermore, would-be participants in Hindu-Jewish dialogue (and here he is writing chiefly for a Jewish audience) must have the "theological will" to strive for commonalities (Goshen-Gottstein 2016, 141, 154, 162), the recognition that the same "religious imagination" by which Jews claim God to be Beyond also empowers Hindus to see many gods (Goshen-Gottstein 2016, 169–171), and the humility to remove Avoda Zara from our own hearts. "In important ways, the encounter with Hinduism may force us to be less idolatrous in our own view of reality" (Goshen-Gottstein 2016, 206).

Indeed, it seems to us that a nuanced, fairer understanding of Hindu image worship may better illuminate the context of ancient Jewish Near Eastern communities, when images were more widespread and the Jerusalem temple cult thriving. Were the Biblical—and later Jewish—depictions of image worship

historically accurate? Is it possible that the cultures to which the prophets and rabbis were exposed made different use of images than the Hindu tradition does? Could they have, in fact, actually worshipped their images directly and construed them as deities? If this was the case, then they constitute a very different class of image worshippers than we find in the Hindu tradition, and the prophets and rabbis depicted them accurately and fairly.

Another possibility is that image worship among those cultures served precisely the same purpose that it does among Hindus. If this was the case, we are left to conjecture about the cause of the misrepresentation of their practice in Biblical and Jewish literature. It is possible that our sources sincerely misunderstood the alien religious phenomena with which they were confronted. Certainly the radically monotheistic Muslim conquerors in India found Hindu temple worship to be alien and sacrilegious; it is probably fair to say that the anti-Hindu invective that survives in many Muslim theological treatises derives from a sincere belief that the stone images they were encountering in the strange land of India were, to use the words of Zia ud-din Barnī, the most important writer on politics in the fourteenth century under the Delhi Sultanate, products of "infidels," "polytheists," and "idolators."[19]

Or might it be that the misrepresentation was intentional? That is, the Biblical critics of image worship may have intended their presentation of image worship as a polemic against the practices of Israel's neighbors—and against the syncretists of their own people who sought to import them into Israelite life. To this end they may have created a caricature, rather than an objective picture, deliberately intending to distort foreign practices for the sake of making them ridiculous, repugnant, and unacceptable to their intended audiences.[20]

Which of these hypotheses seems most likely to be correct? The answer might well derive from yet a third civilization: that of ancient Mesopotamia. Archeology has brought to light the practice of Mesopotamian rulers, priests, and elites to place statues of themselves before images of the deity (Lloyd 161, 100–101). Now it is extremely unlikely that the people who placed these statues before the image of the deity confused the statue with the reality of their own selves. It is far more likely that they understood these statues to be symbolic of themselves. If this is so, can we not presume that they had a similar understanding of the image *itself* before which the statue was placed?

This conjecture is reflected in considerations within Jewish thought. Israeli scholars Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, addressing this very issue in their discussion of "Idolatry and Representation," remind us of the distinction between signs and symbols. What may appear to be presented as the reality of a god—a symbol—might be nothing more than a sign—a signifier of something that lies beyond itself, "with no unique powers, capable of serving

only as reminders and transparent representations of the gods" (Halbertal and Margalit 1992, 39) whose role is "to inspire and teach; they are mainly didactic artifacts and not active figures" (Halbertal and Margalit 1992, 40). The authors identify what would be the motivation of the prophets, and later the rabbis, in railing against their neighbors' idols:

> [Their] great fear of similarity-based representation is the possibility of a substitutive error, in which the idol ceases to be the representation or symbol of God and comes to be seen as God himself or part of him. The purpose of the prohibitions dictating proper methods of representation is to prevent errors of substitution of the representations for God. (Halbertal and Margalit 1992, 42)

So, it seems to us that in addition to building, through heavy theological equipment, a bridge to acceptance of non-Jews, an openness to encounter with Hindus and Hindu worship, such as that in temples or āśramas, is also necessary for participants on the Jewish side of the conversation. A discovery of image worship as practiced in the lived Hindu tradition, in comparison with that described in the Biblical and later Jewish tradition, reveals complexities in the treatment of image worship in the prophets—and in the rabbis who patterned their treatment upon them—which we would otherwise miss. The meeting with living Hindus sheds potential light on the Jewish past.

But there is more to be said, and here we come to our second comparative point, and suggestion. The engagement, the literature, and the motivations behind the Hindu-Jewish dialogue seem to differ, depending on whether one is coming from the Jewish or Hindu perspective. There appears to be a new scholarly interest in this topic among Jewish scholars and rabbis, particularly the Orthodox, where sophisticated historical and theological argumentation is being marshaled to provide sympathetic accommodation of Hindu ideas of God. The context for this interest may be a combination of factors—Israeli youth finding their interest piqued about Hinduism in their post-army backpacking sojourns in India; the opening of diplomatic relations between India and Israel in 1992; the presence of Indian Jews now living in Israel[21]; the encounter between Hindus and Jews in America as a result of immigration; the perceived common threat from Islamic fundamentalist groups; and grassroots attempts at rapprochement, like Western campus conversations about the meaning of the swastika, Indian Embassies' celebrations of Hanukkah, or the children of mixed Hindu and Jewish marriages taking the monikers HinJews or Om-Shalomers. While a select few careful Jewish scholars take the time to travel to India, and to meet with teachers and gurus of the Hindu tradition, the resulting books are largely written by committed Jews; there are fewer practicing Hindus who take the initiative and write books about Hindu-Jewish

theological encounters.[22] In a sense, Hindu-Jewish dialogue is a harder task for the Jewish participants, as the proscription of "idolatry" needs to be explicitly addressed and a possible place for Hindus at the theological table creatively constructed. For Hindu participants, however, the main obstacle is clearing away the mistaken conception by outsiders that they are polytheistic, and hence religiously inferior.

The concerted attempt to convince non-Hindus that Hindus are not polytheistic has a much older trajectory, dating back in India at least to the British period (1757–1947), if not to earlier encounters with Christian missionaries, than the attempt by some Jews to convince others that Hindus are worthy of theological engagement. We saw this above in our discussion of Swamis Vivekananda and Dayanada; speaking more broadly, Wendy Doniger writes:

> Many highly-placed Hindus so admired their colonizers that, in a kind of colonial and religious Stockholm syndrome, they swallowed the Protestant line themselves, and not only gained a new appreciation of those aspects of Hinduism that the British approved of (the Gita, the Upanishads, monism), but became ashamed of those aspects that the British scorned (polytheism, erotic sculptures on temples, devadasi temple dancers). Following the British lead, they gave the Gita a primacy it had not had previously enjoyed, and in lifting up this monolithic form of Hinduism, they trampled down and largely wrote off the dominant strain of Hinduism that celebrated the multiplicity of the divine, the plurality of forms of worship. (Doniger 2010)

The contentious history of the word "Hinduism"—where and when it first arose, and what link it had, or has, to a phenomenon that can be pinned down in terms of a single definition—cannot detain us here.[23] However, the desire among many Hindus for an articulation of their tradition that does not denigrate it but places it on par with monotheistic traditions has gained new force since the mid-twentieth century, when Indian immigration to Christian-majority Western countries quickened in pace.[24] In "Multiculturalism, Immigrant Religion, and Diasporic Nationalism: The Development of an American Hinduism," Prema Kurien demonstrates how many Hindu Indian-Americans are vigorous proponents of both the American "multi-cultural" ideal and a romantic, even militant championing of Hindu ethnic and cultural identity, an identity that rests on the vision of a unified Hinduism (Kurien 2004, 362–385). This Hinduism is made compatible with the dominant pluralist religious culture, in that it is claimed to be tolerant, eternal, and concerned with equal rights for men and women and for people of all castes and classes. Most important for us, Hinduism is described in this diaspora context as monotheistic, or resting on the belief in one God. The degree to which the correct description of Hinduism matters was shown clearly in

the case of the California Textbook Controversy of 2005–2009, when two Hindu nationalist lobbying groups, The Vedic Foundation (VF) and the American Hindu Education Foundation (AHEF), complained to California's Curriculum Commission that the coverage of Hinduism in its sixth grade textbooks was inaccurate and hurtful.[25] The portrayal of Hindus as polytheists was one point of debate.

Thus, when His Holiness Sri Swami Viditatmanandaji stated at the 2007 Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit that "we seek a sympathetic understanding on the part of other religious leaders to not dismiss us as idolaters" ("First Hindu-Jewish Leaders Summit Report"), he was speaking not just to Jews or just to people in Israel but to a centuries-old feeling of being misunderstood by (principally Christian and Muslim) monotheists. There is a diasporic, nationalist, post-colonial element to the Hindu argument for monotheism that seems absent in the Jewish argument for constructing "our own theology of other religions" (Brill 2012, 240). Further, if Hindu members of the Hindu-Jewish dialogue could use the occasion not just to gain theological acceptance—a big step though this may be—but also to familiarize themselves thoroughly with Jewish ideas of monotheism, they would realize that their version of "monotheism" is very different.[26] Real engagement with Jewish theological teachers and traditions, akin to what Alon Goshen-Gottstein and his colleagues have done in reverse, or what many Hindus have done, since the British period, with Christian theology, would bring balance and symmetry to the Hindu-Jewish encounter. Of course, this might not be an attractive agenda for proponents of a uni-cultural vision of Hinduism who seek not nuance but philosophical homogeneity.

The exchange between Jews and Hindus therefore stands on discrete, and often very different, experiences. Indeed, the claim for monotheism is a cipher for self-identity, differentiation, pride, and the hope of acceptance. The ancient Israelites used monotheism to separate themselves from religious Others; modern Hindus are adopting the label of monotheism to erase perceived scorn from religious Others. There is a kinship here, even if one project has a three-thousand-year history and the other only a two-hundred-fifty-year trajectory. In both cases, while the price of monotheism is weighty (Assmann 2010), the conversation about it can be fruitful.

NOTES

1. This was apparently not the first such high-level conversation; in March 2005, the Chief Rabbi of London had met with the Secretary General of the Hindu Forum of Britain.

2. http://www.hafsite.org/sites/default/files/Summit%20Declaration.pdf. An earlier draft statement favored by the Hindus had urged the following wording: "Whereas, in the Hindu vision, G-d being formless, is both immanent and transcendent, and therefore, always present and available for worship, and whereas, as in all religious traditions, certain forms have sacred significance that evoke reverence in the traditions' adherents, and whereas, in the Hindu tradition, the forms and liturgy surrounding them have been held sacred by Hindus for generations, with full knowledge that G-d cannot be confined to a form; and whereas in the spirit of Maimonides, the Jewish tradition recognizes that the issue of idolatry requires expanded and deeper understanding in view of changing times and circumstances and better information, we affirm that Hindu worship is not the idolatry that is condemned in either the Torah or the Talmud . . . , and resolve to respect the practices that define the religious identity of the Hindu community, and condemn all activities that undermine their sanctity." Declarations/HinduJewish_Declaration_of_Mutual_Understanding.pdf, as found on www.arshavidya.in. Accessed November 14, 2015.

3. See, for example, "I am God and there is none else: I am God and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9).

4. Maimonides, in his commentary to Mishnah Sanhedrin 10, but significantly, in none of his other works, refers to these thirteen principles as roots and fundamentals of Jewish belief and law. This selection is included in Ashkenazi prayer books at the conclusion of the morning service.

5. See Genesis 3:8; and Exodus 24:9–11; 33:18, 20–23.

6. See, for instance, the recent commentary of the Conservative movement, *Etz Hayim*, to Exodus 20:4. *Etz Hayim* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001), p. 443; or Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 145.

7. See also Leviticus 26: 1.

8. As presented in innumerable publications, such as Cecil Roth, *Jewish Art, An Illustrated History* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1961); *Jewish Art and Civilization*, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Walker, 1972); and Grace Grossman, *Jewish Art* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1995). See also index listing for "Art" in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 320ff.

9. For statements supporting this claim, see Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 7, 152.

10. A number of Sanskrit words are translated by the English word "image": *mūrti* and *vigraha*, which mean the "body" or "form" of the divine; *pratimā* and *bimba*, which mean the "reflection" or "likeness" of the divine; and *arcā*, which is an object of worship.

11. See H. von Stietencron, "Orthodox Attitudes Toward Temple Service and Image Worship in Ancient India," *Central Asiatic Journal* 21 (1977): 126–138. Scholars infer the late acceptance of image worship from the fact that late Vedic texts add appendices, seemingly reluctantly, about the sculpting and consecrating of icons. The worship of images was Vedicized, with the addition of Vedic mantras and the performance of rituals such as the *homa*, or fire sacrifice. The installation

of a deity in a pot of water, a trident, a rosary, or simultaneously in a range of ritual accoutrements, such that the deity's presence is "fragmented" and "distributed," was and still remains a viable alternative to the establishment of divinity in a single image. See Phyllis Granoff, "Images and their Ritual Use in Medieval India: Hesitation and Contradictions," in *Images in Asian Religions*, pp. 19–55; and, for the terms "fragmented" and "distributed," see Danielle Berti, "The Location of Distinctive Figures in Divine Iconographies (Indian Himalayas)," in *Images in Asian Religions*, pp. 85–115. Despite such evidence of earlier Brahmanical ambivalence, by the eighth century, architecturally in complex temple structures and textually in such ritual-focused compendia as the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, the profusion of images present in Indian temples, shrines, and homes was unmistakable. A similar argument has been made regarding the first Buddhist images in the subcontinent: Gregory Schopen has shown that images were almost uniformly introduced by elite monks and nuns. See his "On Monks, Nuns, and 'Vulgar' Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult in Indian Buddhism," *Artibus Asiae* 49 (1989): 153–168.

12. For a concise, accessible introduction to the Advaita tradition, see Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, *Śaṁkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

13. See, respectively, Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); *The Śākta Pīthas*, ed. D. C. Sircar, 2d rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973); William P. Harman, *The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); and Anne Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

14. An excellent, classic articulation of this is Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 2nd ed. (1985; New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). See also Doris Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes: Origin, Meaning, and Form of Multiplicity in Indian Art* (New York: Brill, 1997).

15. Other important classical philosophical schools in India—the Mīmāṁsakas (loosely speaking, the philosophers of Vedic ritual, who flourished from the third century BCE through the eighth centuries CE) and the Naiyāyikas ("logicians" of the early centuries CE through at least the eleventh, who were concerned with the epistemology of and rational approach to the Vedic truths)—also eschewed image worship. The former claimed that the divine is not needed to explain the efficacy of ritual action, and the latter asserted that ritual action could not affect images in any way whatsoever. Hence in both cases, while image worship was not completely condemned, it was considered ultimately useless. For more on the Mīmāṁsakas and Naiyāyikas, see Gérard Colas, "The Competing Hermeneutics of Image Worship in Hinduism (Fifth to Eleventh Century AD), in *Images in Asian Religions*, 2004, pp. 149–179; and Richard H. Davis, "Indian Image-Worship and its Discontents."

16. Swami Vivekananda was referring to dualistic religions like Christianity (and, one presumes, to similar strands within his own Hindu tradition) that preach the need for worship of prophets, saints, and visible manifestations of the spirit. See Swami

Vivekananda, "Is Vedanta the Future Religion?" (1900), in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols, 5th ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971), 8: 141

17. Swami Dayananda, *The Autobiography of Swami Dayananda*, pp. 12–16, in *The Sources of Indian Tradition*, edited and revised by Stephen Hay, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), vol. 2: Modern India and Pakistan, pp. 54–56. Rammohan Roy (1774–1883), founder of the Bengali Brāhmo Samāj, was another famous early anti-idolatry reformer; like Swami Dayananda, he denounced "idol worship," ridiculing the idea that God could be contained in an image and exhorting Hindus to put aside such beliefs for the recognition of higher, rational, and more philosophical truths. Although at the time Hindu orthodox society pilloried reformers for their radical departure from accepted custom—Roy speaks of the "coolness" of his friends and kin, followed by "antagonism" and then outright "desertion"—all such reformist societies have continued to be influential among select groups of Hindu practitioners. See *The Athanaeum* [London], October 5, 1933, in *The Sources of Indian Tradition*, edited and revised by Stephen Hay, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), vol. 2: Modern India and Pakistan, pp. 20–21.

18. For representative samples, see Alan Brill, *Judaism and World Religions: Encountering Christianity, Islam, and Eastern Traditions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *Same God, Other God: Judaism, Hinduism, and the Problem of Idolatry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and *Jewish Theology and World Religions*, edited by Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Eugene Korn (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012). Goshen-Gottsetein also mentions Pinchas Giller and Daniel Sperber as colleagues in the Hindu-Jewish theological endeavor. See *Same God, Other God*, p. 207 n. 1.

19. From Barnī's advice to the sultan of Delhi. See *The Sources of Indian Tradition*, edited and revised by Ainslie T. Embree, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), vol. 1: Beginnings to 1800, pp. 441–442.

20. Goshen-Gottstein states that this theory is not taken up much in the scholarly literature. See *Same God, Other God*, p. 35, and p. 214 n. 9.

21. For good introductory books on Indian Jews, see: Nathan Katz, *Who Are the Jews of India?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ruby Daniel and Barbara C. Johnson, *Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002); *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-first Century: A View from the Margin*, edited by Nathan Katz, Ranabir Chakravarti, Braj M. Sinha, and Shalva Weil (New York: Palgrave, 2007), and the "Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies," now in its seventeenth year. Nathan Katz, in his research into the traditions and rituals of perhaps the oldest continuous Jewish community in India, the Cochin Jews of Kerala, has postulated common Hindu and Jewish concerns for purity and impurity, and similar metaphors of royalty utilized in the description of the divine. Nathan Katz and Ellen S. Goldberg, *The Last Jews of Cochin: Jewish Identity in Hindu India* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993). Jewish communities never experienced any persecution in India, and they lived side by side for centuries with Hindu neighbors; indeed, they were often the recipients of patronage by Hindu kings. And yet this tolerance and ritual influence never extended

to image worship. Indian Jews maintained a strictly monotheistic frame of reference, and as far as we are aware they did not participate in Hindu temple ritual.

22. One exception is T.M. Manickam, *Dharma according to Manu and Moses* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1977).

23. See, in chronological order: John Stratton Hawley, "Naming Hinduism," *The Wilson Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (summer 1991): 20–34; Wendy Doniger, "Hinduism by Any Other Name," *The Wilson Quarterly* 15, no 3 (summer 1991): 35–41; Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 4 (1995): 692–722; David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 630–659; Brian K. Pennington, "Constructing Colonial Dharma: A Chronicle of Emergent Hinduism, 1830–1831," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 3 (September 2001): 577–603; Will Sweetman, "Unity and Plurality: Hinduism and the Religions of India in Early European Scholarship," *Religion* 31 (2001): 209–224, as reprinted in *Defining Hinduism: A Reader*, edited by J. E. Llewellyn (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 81–98; and Andrew Nicholson, "Hindu Unity and the Non-Hindu Other," chapter 10 of *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

24. In the United States, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the doors to Indian immigration, abolishing the quota system based on national origins.

25. This debate underscored the potentially white-washing facets of the complainants' position. In seeking to remove references to caste, the treatment of women, Vedic polytheism, and even the difference between Hindus and Sikhs or Jains, the VF and AHEF were not only denying aspects of Indian religious history but also coopting and homogenizing others. For further reading, see Christopher Jaffrelot, "The Diaspora and Hindu Nationalism," in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 361–369; Prema Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007); and Sudarsan Padmanabhabn, "Debate on Indian History: Revising Textbooks in California," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 18 (May 6–12, 2006): 1761–1763.

26. "Philosophically, Indian thought is too complicated to be encapsulated under monotheism since 'saṁkhyā,' 'nyāya,' 'vaiśeṣika,' and 'mīmāṁsā,' which are orthodox schools[,] have only a tenuous idea of god. Even Jainism and Buddhism that developed indigenously in India emphasize more on moral conduct and less on rituals. Vedic Hinduism incorporated some of the critiques of Buddhism and Jainism. Even the Upanishads, which [are] considered to be the fountainhead of Indian philosophy, ridicule Vedic ritualism." Sudarsan Padmanabhan, "Debate on Indian History," p. 1762. See also n. 15 above.

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Chapter 2

Shakthi Garbha as Ark of the Covenant at an American Hindu Goddess Temple

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The Parashakthi Temple in Pontiac, Michigan, also known in English as the Eternal Mother Temple, was established in 1999 on sixteen acres of wooded land, down a hillside in an unassuming neighborhood of modest homes, churches, and strip malls. It has been greatly expanded since it was first built to accommodate the numerous deities that have been installed at the temple since the completion of its initial shell. The goddess after whom this temple is named is Parashakthi ("highest power") Karumari Amman, "Black Mariyamman." The inspiration for the Parashakthi Temple in Pontiac is a Karumari Amman temple in Thiruverkadu, a town in Tamil Nadu, South India, and the Parashakthi Temple website proclaims the goddess has manifested herself at both places (http://parashakthitemple.org/t/shakthi-worship, accessed November 2017). While the temple in Thiruverkadu serves mostly local and regional devotees and is a distinctly Tamil Hindu temple, Karumari Amman is said to take form in Michigan as the one, universal female energy who is "Supreme divine eternal consciousness" beyond all particularities and who has created and manifested as the universe (Parashakthi Temple "Shakthi Worship," n.d.).

The Parashakthi Temple's website announces that the Goddess wished to have a house of worship built in the United States so she could give her "Eternal Grace to all her devotees and protect them from harm and tragedies that may befall" the world at large. World protection is therefore an essential part of the temple's articulated mission. The site further declares this goddess to be the singular "Divine Mother" who has been worshipped "in all cultures, the world over, since earliest of times . . . known to us from the ancient written records of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and India."

In Hindu traditions broadly, goddesses are commonly referred to as embodying *śakti*, "power." While the precise meaning of the term changes

over time and from context to context (Pintchman 1994), in devotional Hindu traditions it generally refers to the life-giving, life-sustaining, and enlivening power that the Goddess and her manifold forms embody. As Parashakthi, the Goddess at the temple in Pontiac is represented as the highest divine essence beyond all individual manifest forms and the source of all that exists. Hence, all goddesses and forms of divine female presence are encompassed under her singular presence. At the Parashakthi Temple, the Goddess's all-encompassing nature as the Divine Feminine includes her identification with the Jewish Shekhinah, the immanent presence or "dwelling" of God in the world. In Kabbalistic literature in particular, the Shekhinah is the divine power closest to the created world. Judaism generally does not recognize the existence of goddesses, but the Shekhinah is conceived especially in later Kabbalah to be feminine and is identified as the female aspect of the male God.

At the Parashakthi Temple, all goddesses as well as the idea of "Shekhinah" are just various aspects of the one, supreme Goddess. The temple's website elaborates:

> She has been worshipped as Isis, Sophia, Shekina and with many other names. She manifests in various historical religions of the world, including the most ancient living religious tradition of Hinduism. In the early Church, the Holy Spirit was experienced as feminine, as seen from the writings of some church Fathers. In early Judaism, the figure of wisdom is experienced as feminine and the theology of "Shekina" and other references in the book of Isaiah as to the Motherhood of God are well known. Ever since the resurrection of Christ, the grace of Christ has always manifested itself in the form of Mother Mary. Now, in today's world, there is a new realization to view God as the Mother. (Parashakthi Temple "Shakthi Worship," n.d.)

The Parashakthi Temple presents itself as the promulgator of a new religious vision that captures the ideal of God as Mother in a way that embodies Divine Mother's life-supporting and nurturing qualities but transcends religious division. The temple website continues:

> Hermes Trismegistus realized the concept that the universe and all creation originated from a single source, and that the various Gods are manifestation of the eternal cosmic Divine. . . . More recently, Albert Einstein, during his last years, stated in his Boston Globe article that religion as we know it cannot survive, and that a New Movement that binds all of humanity is needed for the survival and prosperity of mankind. The vision of our Temple is consistent with the ancient beliefs of Isis, teachings of Hermes Trismegistus and Einstein's concept. (Parashakthi Temple "Mahadevi Parashakthi Sannidhi," n.d.)

Those most involved with the temple claim that it is a uniquely powerful spot imbued with Divine Mother's energy in ways that most other Hindu temples—whether in the United States or in India—simply are not. The land on which the temple is built was reportedly chosen by Divine Mother, who guided her human devotees to the land and ensured the temple would be built there just before the turn of the millennium. I have heard temple spokespersons describe the temple to large audiences in public temple events as a "vortex" and a place where communication with Divine Mother functions via a "faster cable" than at other places (c.f. Pintchman 2014, 2015). The land on which the temple was built is described in temple discourse as radiant with her concentrated power. Similarly, the various *mūrti*s (icons) of deities (*devatā*s) established at the Parashakthi Temple are described in temple literature as vibratory cosmic forces whose power comes to be embodied at the temple when their *mūrti*s are ritually established in installation ceremonies.

Included in this discourse about divine power is an object that was brought to the temple from India in 2013, a golden box deemed in temple literature the Shakthi Garbha (*śakti garbha*), or "womb of Śakti (the Goddess)" and equated with the Jewish "Ark of the Covenant." In this chapter, I explore the dynamics surrounding the Shakthi Garbha/Ark of the Covenant equation made in this context. My purpose is not to evaluate whether or not the discourse at the Parashakthi Temple surrounding the Ark of the Covenant is historically accurate in the representation of the ark or the events of the biblical Exodus story; instead my aim is to examine what role this equation serves in advancing the religious objectives of the temple and the devotees most intimately involved with it. The discourse surrounding claims about divinity and divine power at the temple, as evidenced by the above quoted statements, tends generally to breach normative religious, historical, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries and categories. In this particular case, I would argue, such boundary-breaking language marks a metaphorical turn to stories of the momentous past—particularly to the establishment in the Hebrew Bible of a covenant between God and his people, enshrined in the Ark of the Covenant and the second temple in Jerusalem—to create a similarly momentous vision of the present temple and the new covenant it represents. In this instance, multiple layers of meaning attached to the Ark of the Covenant are redeployed to capture what this temple claims to possess: the promise of a new divine covenant embodied in a new land and a new prophetic community.

THE PARASHAKTI TEMPLE IN PONTIAC

Like many other American Hindu temples, the Parashakthi Temple has a governing temple committee (Kurien 2007; cf. Dempsey 2006). However, its

religious life is shaped most profoundly and directly by a charismatic leader, Dr. G. Krishna Kumar, who also serves as the temple committee's president and is a practicing gastroenterologist on staff at William Beaumont Hospital. Kumar reports that he came from India to the United States from Tamilnadu, South India, in the mid 1960s to do his medical internship.[1] During his first decade in the United States, he recounts that he was not especially religious but was instead absorbed in developing his career. Sometime in the early 1970s, he began to feel restless, as if something important were missing. He embarked upon two decades of religious searching and took up a meditation practice. In 1994, Kumar claims, Divine Mother came to him in a vision for the first time and demanded that he build a temple for her so she could come to "the West" and protect her children. The "history" page on the temple website notes that the following occurred in 1994:

> The Divine vision of the Shakthi appears in deep kundalini meditation to Dr. Krishna Kumar, CALLING him to build the temple in USA where all Her children can reach Her, so that she could radiate Her celestial blessings for our peace, happiness and paramount success. Miraculously, sixteen acres of pristine, virgin, lush land was found in the middle of Pontiac, MI (a suburb of Detroit), which was purchased by Dr. Krishna Kumar . . . and it is topographically very similar to the Meenakshi Temple's land in Madurai. There is a stream of water on the south side of the Parashakthi Temple. This land being chosen by Divine Mother herself is a spiritual home where a devotee can transcend the mundane. (Parashakthi Temple "Temple History," n.d)

While the Parashakthi Temple is recognizably Hindu and specifically South Indian Tamil in many ways, it does not situate itself squarely within any particular lineage of Hindu thought or devotion. Theological instruction promulgated at and through the temple shares many features with Upaniṣadic, Purāṇic, and Tantric thought, but it continues to unfold in a process of ongoing revelations that Kumar experiences as direct communications from Divine Mother, revelations that he then transmits to the temple community. While Kumar is the temple's spiritual director and is recognized by many temple devotees as a mystic and religious visionary, he refuses the moniker "guru," insisting instead that he is no more than a "mailman" whose role is to deliver instructions and truths that he claims to receive directly from Divine Mother through divine revelation. Kumar was also a principle founder of the temple. Many other individuals were involved, too, in establishing the temple, and many in that initial group continue to support the temple financially and remain actively engaged in temple activities. However, no one else plays the kind of central role that Kumar does in guiding the temple's ongoing religious life.[2]

In 2012, under Kumar's direction, the Parashakthi Temple started construction on a grand *rājagopura* (also spelled *rājagopuram)* or "royal tower," that was completed and ritually installed in August of 2015 and now stands majestically at the front of the temple's entrance. It contains on its four faces 520 icons, or *vigrahas*, of Hindu deities. Kumar and the temple board oversaw the construction of the *rājagopura* and the placement of each of the *vigrahas*, with an Indian *sthapati*, a traditional temple architect, named Santana Krishnan, and a number of *śilpīs*, or traditional craftsmen, executing its production. However, Kumar insists that the Goddess herself identified through direct revelation to him each *devatā*, or deity, to be installed. Kumar also insists the Goddess commanded that the *rājagopura* be constructed according to her precise directions in order to channel her healing and protective energy effectively to the western world, in keeping with the mission of the temple. In 2012, Kumar gave a talk (now on YouTube[3]) revealing that Divine Mother had appeared to him in his meditation and requested that it be built. Thereafter, the community devoted a great deal of money, time, and energy to realizing his vision.

In the earliest stages of construction, Kumar insists he did not know how many *vigrahas* would finally occupy the *rājagopura*—at first he thought 50, then 350, then 450—but in the end, he insists, Divine Mother revealed to him the need to bring to the *rājagopura* the energy of 520 *devatā*s to properly channel her complete healing and protective energy to the earth. These 520 *devatā*s, according to Kumar, represent the totality of all the divine energy in the universe. At the Parashakthi Temple, the *rājagopura* functions the way a number of other sacred objects at the temple also function: to channel and transmit divine power, especially protective power. In a conversation I had with him in July 2015, Kumar notes also that like other objects at the temple, the *rājagopura* serves to greatly enhance the spiritual receptivity of all who set foot on temple-owned land.[4]

The *rājagopura* is an architectural element most often associated with the grand temple complexes built by South Indian royal dynasties. George Michell notes that such *gopura*s, "towered gateways," originated among the Pallavas (sixth to nineth centuries) in Tamilnadu and emerged as a dominant temple element by the time of the Pandyas during the twelfth century (Michell 1977, 150). He observes further that *gopura*s functioned as gateways to temple grounds and became increasingly important as large temple complexes, with defensive walls built around them, began to absorb a greater number of community functions (Michell 1977, 151–155). A *rāja-* or "royal" *gopura* is the tallest *gopura* and marks the entrance to the temple itself. While several art historians have discussed the *rājagopura* in the context of South Indian temple styles (e.g., Kramrisch 1976; Michell 1977), little has been written about their religious significance. Samuel K. Parker

notes that at its simplest, the *rājagopura* functions as a sign indicating the location of the temple, "just like the sign that you put in front of your house to let people know where you live" (Parker 2009, 152). In an interview I conducted with him in 2013, Kumar claimed the location of the Parashakthi Temple's *rājagopura* just outside the temple was in fact significant, but for a different reason. He noted that Divine Mother wants the energy embodied in the *rājagopura* to reach anyone who might come near to it or even look at it from a distance—in Hindu terms, get *darśana* of the *rājagopura*—even if they are not Hindu or even religiously inclined. Kumar's remarks echo in some ways Parker's observance in his discussion of the construction of new *gopura*s in South India that traditional temple architects (*sthapati*s) continue to construct new *gopura*s with reference to former caste restrictions, where "people who are not allowed to have the lord's *darshan* ('sight') inside the temple can take *darshan* of his or her image on the *gopuram*" (158). At the Parashakthi Temple, however, the limitation to be overcome is understood as one that is not socially imposed, but is instead related to spiritual development. The Goddess desires to reach outward to help and protect all humans and hence strives to overcome potential resistance or lack of religious interest by having this spiritually powerful structure built in a location where it can radiate energy even to those who do not actively seek it.

There are many distinctive elements to the Parashakthi Temple's *rājagopura*. The particular collection of 520 *vigrahas*, for example, is unique to this location since each *vigraha* was chosen by the Goddess, revealed one by one over the course of almost three years.[5] The idea that the Divine—in this case, the Goddess—is really the chief architect of the *rājagopura* with human agents selected to fulfill her will is one that is not, to my knowledge, common in the Indian context. Furthermore, all of the *vigraha*s are made of granite from the same quarry in South India; the granite was chiseled out by hand instead of being blasted out, adding a great deal of time and expense to the project, because Divine Mother allegedly did not want any violent or destructive energy to make its way into the stone and hence demanded that it be removed without the use of any kind of explosive device. But perhaps the most distinctive element is the golden box that is now buried under concrete in the northeast corner of the *rājagopura*. The northeast was chosen because it is the corner of Agni, deity of fire, who is associated with both transformation and communication.[6] This box is the above-mentioned Shakthi Garbha, "the womb of the goddess," that is equated at the temple with the Israelite Ark of the Covenant.

In 2013, Kumar brought this box back from India. He deemed it the Shakthi Garbha, or "womb of Śakti (the Goddess)," allegedly at the Goddess's behest. Kumar claims that the Goddess herself had revealed to him back in 2012 the need for a box-like object that would function like a *yantra* to energize the

rājagopura and make it effective.[7] She reportedly also revealed to him what it would look like and commanded him to get it made according to her instruction. On one of the many trips he took to India in 2012, he recounts, he met a *siddha* (a tantric practitioner) near Rishikesh who said he could get such an object for Kumar through a contact he had in South India. Santana Krishnan, the *sthapati* hired to oversee construction of the *rājagopura*, coordinated the making of the Shakthi Garbha according to the instructions that Kumar passed on. Kumar says he does not know who actually made it and notes that he did have to pay for it, but when I pressed him on this point, he noted only that he did not pay very much. Divine Mother reportedly also revealed to Kumar that the Shakthi Garbha would have to be filled with sixty substances that he would have to collect. Among the items were a number of herbs and roots that had to be obtained from the Kolli Hills in Tamil Nadu. Kumar himself went to the mountain in 2012, where he claims to have met another *siddha* who collected the materials on his behalf. Krishnan, the *rājagopura* architect, then coordinated the collection of items, which included also Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta symbols, such as a small trident, conch shell, and *cakra*, for example, soil from various natural bodies (like ant hills, lakes, mountains, and oceans), gems and metals, eight types of aromatics, eight types of medicines, four swastikas made from different kinds of metal, and other sacred objects that are considered secret and are not to be revealed to the public. In total, there are said to be sixty items that were ritually installed in the Shakthi Garbha in July of 2015. Kumar claims that these sixty substances all together contain all the seeds of creation and, hence, are all that would be needed to recreate the universe if the universe were to be destroyed. The Shakthi Garbha itself contains twenty-five chambers representing the twenty-five *tattva*s of *prakṛti* (matter), that is, the twenty-five constituent parts that, in Hindu philosophical thinking, are said to make up the totality of the created universe.[8]

Kumar has promulgated through talks, temple literature, and the temple's main website the equation of this Shakthi Garbha with the "Ark of the Covenant" described first in the Hebrew Bible and elaborated in later Jewish and Christian sources. When Kumar first made this equation, he says he himself was not completely satisfied with it, although it is by now an established, official part of temple discourse. He reports that after the Shakthi Garbha was made according to his instructions, Krishnan—the *sthapati* he had hired to make the *rājagopura* and coordinate the creation of the Shakthi Garbha according to Kumar's instructions—immediately exclaimed that the object looked like the Ark of the Covenant according to artists' renditions of it. Kumar thought the parallel was meaningful, but he was unhappy with what he saw as the word's implication that punishment would be involved for those who choose to break the covenant, as detailed in the Hebrew Bible. For Kumar, Divine Mother is never punishing. When Kumar first spoke

about the Shakthi Garbha both publicly, in the 2012 talk, and in an interview I conducted with him in 2013, he noted that nevertheless he then continued to use the word "covenant" because, he said, "In a historical way, the only thing I can connect and compare that would be the Ark of Covenant, the Ark of Covenant that was given . . . to Moses."

In the book of Exodus (25:10–22) in the Hebrew Bible, God is said to reveal to Moses instructions for making a receptacle to contain the stone tablets on which were to be inscribed (and later reinscribed after the original tablets were destroyed) the Ten Commandments proclaimed at Mt. Sinai. This became widely known as the "Ark of the Covenant," with the term "ark" (אָרוֹן, *aron*) here indicating a "chest" or receptacle. Exodus 25:10 describes the ark as two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits high, and one and a half cubits wide (approximately 45 x 27 x 27 inches, assuming a biblical cubit is about 18 inches). It was to be made of Acacia wood but covered in gold both inside and out, with gold rings at each of its four feet for poles to be attached so the ark could be carried (Exodus 25:11–12). God commands that his "testimony," the Ten Commandments, be placed inside the ark, which is to be covered with a cover or lid (כַּפֹּרֶת, *kapporet*) made of pure gold (Exodus 25:16). Two cherubim, angelic beings, are to be fashioned on each end of the lid and placed facing each other, spreading their wings upward, and looking down to the lid (Exodus 25:20–21). The cherubim function both to guard the ark and to form a throne for God's presence to dwell above the lid, with the tablets containing the Ten Commandments at God's feet. God announces he will come to dwell there in that place just above the ark and between the cherubim and from there will communicate with Moses and the rest of the Israelites (Exodus 25:22). The ark is thus described as the earthly embodiment of God's concentrated presence, moral instruction, and divine power, bridging the divide between God and human devotees.

Numbers 10:33–36 claims that the Israelites carried the ark with them when they left Sinai; God also journeyed alongside the ark and the Israelites in the form of a cloud. Hence, we find "accounts of the miracles that occurred alongside the ark—the drying up of the waters of the Jordan when the ark preceded the people (Josh. 3–4) and the fall of the walls of Jericho after the ark encircled them seven times (Josh. 6)" (Grintz and Freedman 2007, 467). The ark is associated with military victory and conquest, as its presence in the Israelite camp is viewed as ensuring God's help in battle. The ark came eventually to rest in the first temple in Jerusalem, although the fate of the ark after the first temple's destruction is not known. When it came to reside in the Jerusalem temple, "there were apparently no cherubim on the ark cover, but two, ten cubits in height and made of olive wood overlaid with gold, stood on the floor in front of the ark" (Grintz and Freedman, 466).

God's divine presence, his Shekhinah, is also said to come to dwell at the first temple. The ark's associations with divine power, especially military might, and its mysterious disappearance after the destruction of the first temple served as inspiration for the 1981 hit film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in which the fictional character Indiana Jones heads up a US government attempt to locate and take possession of the Ark of the Covenant before the Nazis are able to find it and thereby access its incredible power, which might enable them to succeed in taking over the world. Christian traditions later equated Mary, the mother of Jesus, with the Ark of the Covenant; just as the original ark had been a unique vessel blessed with the ability to contain God's power and moral teaching, so Mary was the "new" Ark of the Covenant, able to contain divinity and the new covenant (embodied as Jesus) within her body (Livius 1893, 76, 77).

The Shakthi Garbha installed at the Parashakthi Temple is smaller in size than the Ark of the Covenant is likely to have been, but it is also gilded; on the top, instead of cherubim, sit two lions, representing, as one devotee wrote to me in an email, "The beast qualities of a human being and how the Divine Mother will help us conquer that beast and use it for the welfare of society." Like the Ark of the Covenant, the Shakthi Garbha has rings around the edge for staves to be inserted so it can be carried. When the ark was installed in the first temple in Jerusalem, it is said to have been given a special place in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum, where it resided "at the exact center of the whole world"; in front of it stood the *even shettiyah* or "foundation stone" that was described later in Rabbinic commentary as "the starting point of the creation of the world" (Grintz and Freedman 2007, 468). Similarly, at the Parashakthi Temple, the installed Shakthi Garbha represents the new world center, the womb that contains creation in microcosmic form. One devotee who is closely involved in the temple even described Kumar as the new Moses, founding a new religious movement that would now grow following the installation of the Shakthi Garbha and *rājagopura*. A booklet distributed at the Mahā- Kumbhābhiṣekam or "Grand Opening" celebration for the installation of the *rājagopura* in August of 2015 describes the Shakthi Garbha as the "universal ark of covenant" whose mission is "BUILDING and BRIDGING peace BETWEEN NATIONS and Individual spirit covenant with the Divine." The ultimate goal of this new, "Cosmic Covenant" is the "illumination of mind and spirit, leading to connection with supreme spirit" (Parashakthi Temple 2015, 44).

The Parashakthi Temple's website asserts:

> Similar to the ark in the ancient Jewish tradition, the sacred garbha box containing 60 materials will be made with gold, silver, brass, along with other mystical materials with cosmic energies will be placed in the holiest of places

> in the stone engraving of the Rajagopuram as instructed by Divine Mother Parashakthi. The garbha, in which are preserved the germs of all things necessary to repopulate the earth, including many mystically energized herbs and metals, representing the survival of life, and the supremacy of spirit over matter. Prophet Moses received the instructions for making the Ark of Covenant by God and Solomon's Temple, also known as the First Temple, was the main temple in ancient Jerusalem that housed the Ark of Covenant. The chest was said to be a source of miraculous power. . . . At our temple as designed by Divine Mother, the Shakthi Garbha which is the source of all energies will have miraculous powers that will bring immense spiritual and material benefits to Devotees and make the rajagopuram at Parashakthi Temple one of the holiest places in the world. (Parashakthi Temple "Shakthi Garbha," n.d.)

The equation drawn between the Shakthi Garbha and the Ark of the Covenant facilitates language that Kumar understands as most appropriate for describing not just the relationship between God and the Israelites, but also the ideal relationship between the Goddess and her devotees at the Parashakthi Temple. The Shakthi Garbha and the Ark of the Covenant are described as embodying both divine power, which pervades the universe and is perceptible to those ready to receive it, and the ethical agreement of devotees to act with righteousness (*dharma*) and truthfulness (*satya*) as well as to pursue understanding of the Self as described in the Upaniṣads. In both the narratives recounted in the Hebrew Bible and the self-understanding of devotees at the Parashakthi Temple, the Divine (God or the Goddess) reveals to a human community of devotees truths about the nature of divinity and the requirements of human moral action; in both cases, the Divine enters into a covenant with a community of devotees, a covenant that requires sacrifice and devotion; and in both cases, the Divine directs a human agent (Moses or Kumar) regarding the fashioning of a receptacle to contain the material that embodies the divine/human relationship. There is a telos to the equation as well; Kumar insists that if all people enter into the covenant symbolized by the Shakthi Garbha, "The nations will become friendly. There won't be any wars. There will be pure love, understanding, generosity, and compassion. All of it becomes innate with the soul. So the world will be a better place. So this ark, the Shakthi Garbha, will grant peace between nations, peace between races, peace between people—if they receive the energy" (Kumar 2012). The nature of the Shakthi Garbha as a "womb" also echoes also the Christian equation of Mary, mother of Jesus, with the ark. In Christian understanding, Mary has been described as a new vessel of divine power from whose womb comes forth a new manifestation of divinity on earth (in the person of Jesus) and the embodiment of a new moral law that will supplant that which has been proclaimed in the "Old" Testament. At the Parashakthi Temple, similarly, the Shakthi Garbha is presented as supplanting all that has come before

it; the Goddess is birthing the world anew and calling us to enter into a new moral compact that will allow humankind to navigate the murky and dangerous waters of modern times.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Vasudha Narayanan notes there are many ways in which immigrant Hindus transform the American landscape into sacred liturgical space through ritual and argues that examining such rituals gives scholars an opportunity to "appreciate the ways in which individuals and institutions" existing in diaspora "co-opt the local landscape into a part of the Hindu world" (Narayanan 2005, 127–28). She details four such possible strategies, noting that her list is not exhaustive: (a) adapting Purāṇic cosmology by identifying the United States as a specific island (*dvīpa*) quoted in the texts: (b) composing prayers and devotional songs extolling the state in which the new temples are located; (c) physically consecrating the land with waters from sacred Indian rivers and American rivers; and (d) recreating the physical landscape of certain holy places in India (128). Hinduism in India, Narayanan observes, is "closely tied to land in the Indian subcontinent and is very territorial. . . . To transform and in some way acknowledge the American land . . . as sacred is a bold, innovative, and perhaps necessary act of being Hindu on foreign soil" (Narayanan 2006, 157).

What is going on at the Parashakthi Temple, however, is somewhat different. Here the new land does not reproduce the Hindu landscape but instead supersedes and surpasses it in sacrality. Pontiac is the new Pandyan empire—a play on words that Kumar's astrologer in South India made when I was interviewing him in Chennai in 2009—and the Goddess's new abode in Michigan is made more sacred than almost all the temples in India through the ritual emplacement at the temple of powerful sacred objects and structures, including the Shakthi Garbha and the *rājagopura* that it enlivens. But it is also, symbolically, the new Jerusalem, succeeding the mighty temple in which God's *shekhinah* came to dwell so long ago, and the new Gospel. America is no longer the diaspora but becomes instead the new Promised Land, the real home to those who are conscripted to the Goddess's service. Imagery invoking the biblical covenant formed between the ancient Israelites and God then becomes a vehicle for signifying the new pact that the Divine is forging for a new millennium, in a new landscape, and with a new human leader—Kumar—and a new covenantal community.

NOTES

1. The account summarized here of Kumar's life leading up to the founding of the temple is based on interviews I conducted with him in 2008-2009.
2. For more on the founding of the temple, see Pintchman (2014).
3. "Shakthi Garbha or Ark of Covenant in Hinduism at Sri Parashakthi Rajagopuram and Bali Peetam Meaning," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjYh0iEYiyk.
4. I have written about two Shaligram stones that function similarly as vehicles of protective energy and that Kumar brought to the temple at Divine Mother's behest. See Pintchman (2015).
5. The list of 520 *vigrahas* is given in a booklet that was distributed at the "Grand Opening" consecrating the *rājagopura* in August of 2015.
6. In Vedic sacrificial traditions and ongoing Hindu temple *homam* or *havan* practices, Agni is considered a divine messenger who transforms sacrificial offerings into smoke to nourish the gods and carries human prayers to them.
7. *Yantras* or "sacred diagrams" are placed under *mūrtis* in temples to bring them to life.
8. Sāṁkhya philosophy, one of the six main schools of Hindu philosophy, maintains that there are twenty-three principles, called *tattva*s, that flow forth at the beginning of creation from *prakṛti*, "matter," when it interacts with *puruṣa*, pure consciousness: intellect (*buddhi* or *mahat*), egoity (*ahaṁkāra*), mind (*manas*), five sense capacities (*buddhīndriyas*: hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling), five action capacities (*karmendriyas*: speaking, grasping, walking, excreting, and procreating), five subtle elements (*tanmātras*: sound, contact, form, taste, and smell), and five gross elements (*mahābhūtas*: ether, air, fire, water, and earth). These twenty-three principles plus *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* all together constitute the twenty-five constituent parts of the entire created world.

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Chapter 3

Working toward a More Perfect World

Hospitality and Domestic Practices in Indian and Jewish Normative Texts

Philippe Bornet

COMPARING BRAHMANICAL AND RABBINIC TRADITIONS

As Barbara Holdrege already noted two decades ago, within an array of different forms of "Judaisms" and "Hinduisms" and despite a preconceived view that considers them as almost diametrically opposed, Brahmanical and Rabbinic traditions present remarkable affinities (Holdrege 1996, 1–2). Among a number of similarities, such as a particular relation to a textual revelation (Torah and Veda), an idealized relation to a territory or an acute concern for purity matters, both traditions share a special, almost obsessional, attention to household ceremonials. In this chapter, we focus on social practices taking place within households and involving the temporary stay of persons from the outside, such as the partaking of a meal or an overnight stay. In so doing, we maintain that, despite being unspectacular, such practices have played a significant role in the progressive reshaping of a world that conforms to the ideal conception of the tradition's guardians. Referring to recent studies on households, mobility, and hospitality (Sivertsev 2002, Sivertsev 2005, Rosenblum 2010, and Hezser 2011, for the Rabbinic context; Jamison 1996, Lubin 2002, and Balbir 2004 for the Brahmanical context), it is argued that those practices have been major loci of the reinvention of both traditions when their respective elites were put under pressure. In particular, reactions to crucial events affecting sacrificial practices in both traditions—the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Titus in 70 and the decrease in patronage to Brahmins priests—can tentatively explain a number of similarities in the prescriptions that relate to household practices. To assess this hypothesis, we compare texts from both traditions dealing with interaction rituals (greeting and saying farewell), and seating arrangements or etiquette.

Comparison of both cases should not only shed light on the specificities of each tradition but also help us think about their significance in terms that transcend their idiosyncrasies. As Holdrege also argued, since both traditions significantly diverge from a familiar Protestant conception of religion that has been informing the academic study of religions for a long time, comparative work grounded in this data can pave the way for a work of "rectification" at a theoretical level (Holdrege 1996, 6, and more recently Holdrege 2010, 165).[1]

HOUSEHOLD CEREMONIALS IN NORMATIVE SOURCES

Brahmanical and Rabbinic traditions both possess extensive legal socio-codes that teach proper modes of behavior, not only in religious matters but also for tasks carried out in everyday life, including all kinds of gestures in the domestic realm.

For the rabbinic context, such codes were first formalized in the Mishnah and expanded by the rich discussions recorded in later Rabbinic literature, the Palestinian and Babylonian Gemaras. To this are added little tractates dealing specifically with etiquette and "decorum," *Derekh ʿEretz Rabba* and *Derekh ʿEretz Zuta*. The date of composition of this literature, which itself records sayings attributed to rabbis who have lived at various times, is highly debated: for the Mishnah, the *terminus ante quem* is around the beginning of the third century. The other texts can be situated along a timespan from 200 to 600 CE approximately.[2] On the Indian side, those topics appear prominently in *gṛhya* and *dharma* tractates—that is the various *gṛhyasūtra*, *dharmasūtra*, and *dharmaśāstra*, dated anywhere between 300 BCE to 300 CE. Composed in Brahmanical circles, the texts are originally "school literature" belonging to specific Vedic schools, but have progressively made their way to broader audiences (Olivelle 2000, 4–17). All texts are eminently utopian in the sense that they tell us about the pious wishes of their authors: a social and ritual world as it should be and not as it actually was.[3] Even if the relation of these sources with actual, historically situated practices is uneasy to determine with certainty to say the least, it is certainly possible to look at them under an ethnographic lens, sorting out their anthropological and sociological implications.

INTERACTION RITUALS

The socio-codes of both traditions contain an impressive number of rules concerning interactions with actors from outside the family circle, with an emphasis on "liminal" practices, such as invitations and greetings. It is

remarkable that they are explicitly formulated in the same texts that deal with more conventional religious matters: a sign that these questions are not as trivial as they might seem at first.[4]

Rabbinic texts develop extensively issues related to the organization of meals to which several guests participate: a host should extend an invitation to potential guests well in advance, mentioning whether other guests (and if so, which) are also expected, striving to avoid a situation that would force his interlocutor(s) to decline the invitation (Tosefta Bava Batra 6.14).[5] On his side, a guest is expected to accept the invitation, with a few exceptional cases such as fasting or judging other attendees or the host as "unworthy" (bT Bava Metsi`a 86b–87a). On the reception's day, the interaction begins with a codified greeting: the host, with a friendly face, says something like "arrive in peace" (*bo´ekha / bo´ekhem beshalom*) (bT Berakhot 64a, cf. Krauss 1910–1912, vol. 3, 16). Logically, the greeter expects an answer from the greetee, and whoever does not answer is called a thief (bT Berakhot 6b). The end of the interaction is ritualized in a similar way: the texts insist that the host escorts his guest on the way back, boldly stating: "Whoever does not escort others or does not allow himself to be escorted: it is as if he sheds blood" (bT Soṭa 46b, cf. Krauss 1910–1912, vol. 3, 17). As he had previously wished his guest to arrive in peace, the host now wishes him—rarely her (Bornet 2010, 201–204)—to go "in the direction" of peace (*leshalom*), but not "in the peace" (*beshalom*)—a formula employed for a deceased person (bT Nedarim 24a).

Indian sources equally focus on such liminal gestures and prescribe a number of recommended behaviors. A first principle states that a Brahmin—who might or might not be himself a householder (*gṛhastha*)—should not visit another house without having been properly invited by its householder (YājñDh 1.112). The acceptation of an invitation (*pratigraha*), however, is one of the traditional tasks associated with the Brahmanical rank—one that can quickly become ambiguous, since it can easily conflict with other imperatives such as avoiding contact with certain types of food or people (Kane 1930–1962, vol. 2.1, 113–114). As soon as the visitor arrives, the householder greets him with a standard formula (*abhivādana*), whose content varies with the identity of the greeted person. The *abhivādana* implies, from the greetee's side, to be aware of a response formula (*pratyabhivādana*) (MDh 2.119–130, tr. Olivelle 2005, 101).[6] With the ablution of the feet that is following, it can be categorized as a rite of "integration," by which a person from outside of the domestic circle is temporarily made into a family member, under a regime that is performatively enacted by the formula's utterance. For this reason, the ceremonial greeting is only to be executed once, at the very beginning of the encounter.[7] The ending of the social interaction entails the escorting of the guest (*anuvrajana*) on the way back, until reaching the limits

of the host's village. In the different rites, the symbolic authority is almost always on the side of the guest, who commands his host at several points in the interaction.[8]

Looking now at both traditions from an external point of view, the analyses of sociologist Erving Goffman, on interaction rituals, are of particular interest: such rituals can be considered as a way to remove the anxieties that arise from an encounter with people "from the outside." Goffman writes that "[g]reetings provide a way of showing that . . . this relationship involves sufficient suppression of hostility, for the participants temporarily drop their guards and talk" and that farewells "sum up the effect of the encounter upon the relationship and show what the participants may expect of one another when they next meet" (Goffman 1967, 41). In this sense, social "micro-gestures" have consequences that reach far beyond individual and domestic concerns: they contribute to build a special and temporary society by characterizing roles to be endorsed by their members and by signaling the belonging to this group.

A PERFECT SOCIETY

This notion of a "special society" appears in the background of other actions to be performed during the entire venue, contributing to make the temporary society a permanent one. This comprises correct ways to eat, to drink, to move within the household, or to address other people (including the question of relations between male guests and women in the household). We focus here on two aspects: spatial arrangements (seating maps) and chronologies (questions of precedence).

In Rabbinic texts, this begins with specifying a right way to enter a house, stating that the host enters his house first, followed by his guest. Conversely, when the guest is about to leave, he goes first, followed by the host (Der 4.6, tr. Van Loopik 1991, 97–98). The ruling witnesses a sensitivity concerning the situation of the host's wife, who should not be left alone with an unknown person, even for a short while—revealing the tacit gendered pattern of these relations. Other rules creating a social order appear in the recitation of the benedictions over a meal (*birkat ha-motsi* and *birkat ha-mazon*) as well as in the ablution of the hands, at the beginning and end of a meal (*mayim rishonim* and *mayim ´acharonim*): the "elder" (*zaqen*) is generally given the opportunity to wash his hands, to recite the benediction, and to eat first.[9] Equally significant are the prescribed seating arrangements. A famous statement of the ´Avot tractate says: "Let your home be a gathering place for sages." A commentary adds that a Sage can receive students and teach them, but that students should sit not on a bed, a chair, or even a footstool, but directly on

the ground (ARN A 6, tr. Smilévitch 1983, 115 on M ´Avot 1.4, tr. Neusner 1988, 673).[10] Conversely, in the case of a student receiving a scholar, the student is told to "sit on the ground, and [to] let the best place to the Sage" (ARN B 11, tr. Smilévitch 1983, 319). In these different examples, the actual practices systematically mirror the respective positions of the protagonists along the Rabbinic yardstick of Torah knowledge.[11]

A recurring argument to make those rules authoritative appeals to the logics of shame and honor.[12] Both parties put their honor at risk in the social interaction and behave in such a way that no shame is generated.[13] This is explicitly expressed in the following Rabbinic text:

> Any scholar [*talmid chakham*] who is negligent in [the observance of] washing his hands is shameful [*megunneh*]. Even more shameful than him is he [the host] that eats before [his] guest [eats]. [And] even more shameful than him is the guest who invites [another] guest. But more shameful than the three of them is a guest who causes trouble to the host. (Dez 7.9, tr. Sperber 1990, 138, modified)

As Sivertsev observed, such prescriptions are similar to those found in household codes stemming from Greco-Roman and Christian circles as well as elite Jewish circles of the first century CE, characterized by their extreme attention to details of protocol (Sivertsev 2005, 212–213).[14] In their Rabbinic instantiation, however, those behaviors become characteristic of the "disciples of the wise" (*talmide chakhamim*), i.e., learned scholars and, by extension, of any person wanting to identify with them.

On the Brahmanical side, the formalization of visits and social gatherings not only mirrors but also reinforces hierarchies. This is first observed in the very notion of *atithi*, which does not refer to any guest, but is restricted to Brahmins. We read:

> Some straw, a place on the floor, water and fourth, a pleasant word of welcome—at least these are never wanting in the houses of good people. Tradition defines a guest [*atithi*] as a Brahmin who spends just one night. He is called "guest" [*atithi*] because his stay is brief. A Brahmin living in the same village or on a social visit cannot be considered a guest even when he comes to a house which has a wife or even sacred fires (MDh 3.101–3.103, tr. Olivelle 2005, 113).

According to this text, an *atithi* is then exclusively a Brahmin who stays overnight and comes from a different village.[15] Having defined the status of "guest" in such a restrictive way, the texts proceed to detail different times in the interaction where the respective positions of the actors are spatially and temporally played out. A householder is told to receive a guest with a seat (*āsana*) that has, if possible, "not a few feet" (ĀpDh 2.(3).6.7–15, tr. Olivelle 2000, 83),[16] emphatically implying that the guest should be installed on a

seat and not on the ground—with the seat reflecting the visitor's prestige. The same text continues and states that persons belonging to other *varṇa* are technically not "guests" (*atithi*) but can be received, provided they are not "heretics" (*pāṣaṇḍin*)[17]:

> A *kṣatriya* is not called "guest" [*atithi*]; nor is a *vaiśya*, a *śūdra*, a friend, a relative, or an elder. . . . If, however, a *kṣatriya* comes to his [of a brahmin] house fulfilling the conditions of a guest, he should show kindness and feed him after the Brahmins have finished their meal. (MDh 3.110; 112, tr. Olivelle 2005, 114)

The reception's modalities again reflect the social status of the guests: Vaiśya and Śūdra can share a meal with the householder's servants and only eat leftovers—as the householder's wife usually does—*after* male Brahmins have eaten. Arguments involving purity concerns are the most effective tools to keep these different classes of eaters apart, since some groups are "purer" than others, as we shall see below.

These issues are exacerbated in the special case of a funerary meal, the *śrāddha*.[18] On this occasion, a householder invites a specific number of Brahmins who both execute the ritual for him and represent its recipients: gods and ancestors (*pitṛ*). The procedure of invitation is particularly complex, and a householder has to make sure that his guests are virtuous and knowledgeable enough (MDh 3.129 and MDh 3.131).[19] Once gathered for the ceremony, the organizer of the *śrāddha* brings out dishes for the guests but does not eat with them. The sacrifice involves cooking rice balls (*piṇḍa*) and other dishes that are offered to gods and to the family's ancestors. Rare foods that are difficult to obtain, such as rhinoceros meat, goat, or wild honey, are particularly recommended: they are known to satisfy gods and ancestors for a long period or even indefinitely.[20] As Charles Malamoud noted, the system involves a "cascade of leftovers" (Malamoud 1989, 18): Brahmins eat the leftovers of gods and ancestors; the leftovers of the Brahmins are the part of the deceased and are available to the servants, and the householder consumes what is left in the pots used for cooking. The system establishes hierarchical relations between beings (men or gods) who eat "the principal" and those who eat leftovers.[21] During the whole time of the reception, a (Brahmin) guest refrains from speaking without a good reason to do so and avoids any gesticulation (of the hands, feet, etc.), so as to not be considered as a troublemaker (YājñDh 1.112 and the Mitākṣarā commentary *ad loc*, tr. Vidyārṇava 1974, 230–231). In the case of a meal shared by several persons, the general rule is that one stands only after all guests are done eating. If a person finishes his meal before the others—which implies giving leftovers and pouring water in the mouth—then the meal is interrupted, generating shame for whomever broke the right order (ĀpDh 1.(5).17.3, tr. Olivelle 2000, 53).[22]

This is a substantial divergence from the Rabbinic context in which, even if the group is carefully composed and even if there are serving and eating orders, all guests end up eating together. We shall return later to this important point. In both traditions, however, the deviation from the expected behavior brings shame, for example, when one declines an invitation when accepting it was possible (Jamison 1996, 200).

Operating at the level of household ceremonials, etiquette thus not only defines a way to be together and a sense of belonging to a special group. It also relates to the conception of a "perfect society," with its hierarchies and solidarities: a society which reflects values that are the dearest to its architects, Rabbis and Brahmins. These values include Torah or Veda knowledge, the respect of the elites' authority, and an agreement with a particular worldview that involves supernatural beings as active agents.

SANCTIFYING AND RITUALIZING THE HOUSEHOLD

We move now to a third aspect related to these domestic practices: their symbolic and functional assimilation into major rituals, granting them effects of a similar order and making them absolutely compulsory, since nothing less than the cosmic order is at stake. This is the case in both traditions around essentially two themes: sacrifices and purity.

Sacrifices

Obsolete sacrificial practices compose a reserve of symbolic meanings that can easily be associated with different practices such as household ceremonials and study.[23] This is well expressed in a Rabbinic text that develops the idea that partaking a meal is similar to a sacrifice and entails positive as well as negative consequences, depending on how it is conducted: if "words of Torah" are being uttered at the table, it is a sacrifice to the Lord; in the opposite case, it is similar to sacrifices offered to "idols":

> R. Simeon [b. Yochai][24] says: "Three who ate at a single table and did not talk about teachings of Torah while at that table are as though they ate from *dead sacrifices* (Psalms 106:28), as it is said, *For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness [if they are] without God*" (Isaiah 28:8). "But three who ate at a single table and did talk about teachings of Torah while at that table are as if they ate at the table of the Omnipresent, blessed is he, as it is said: *And he said to me, This is the table that is before the Lord* (Ezekiel 41:22)." (M ´Avot 3.3, tr. Neusner 1988, 678–678)

For Catherine Hezser (1998, 559), the text could allude to actual debates about Torah, taking place during communal meals, an equivalent to philosophical discussions during meals among Greco-Roman elites. To this can be added the very "practical" purpose that such gatherings may have fulfilled, constituting a space where different (legal) activities related to the preservation of tradition could be carried out. In that sense, the passage illustrates the idea that a meal is a place where the tradition is being rehearsed and reconstructed, whether among elites or lay people.[25] Similarly, the following passage displays a real concern for making a meal a special time, inserting it into a sacrificial scheme:

> *The altar, three cubits high, and the length thereof two cubits, was of wood, and so the corners; the length thereof and the walls thereof, were also of wood; and he said unto me [the prophet Ezekiel, for whom the whole passage is a vision]: "This is the table that is before the Lord."* (Ezekiel 41:22)—[The verse] begins with the altar and ends with the table! R. Jochanan and Resh Laḳish both explain: At the time when the Temple stood, the altar used to make atonement for a person; now a person's table [*shulchano shel ´adam*] makes atonement for him [*mekhapper `alaw*]. (bT Chagiga 27a, tr. Epstein 1978b, vol. 4, 170)

R. Yochanan's and Resh Laqish's interpretation unfolds from a verse that seems illogical: what is described as an altar (*mizbeach*) is referred to in the end of the same verse as a table (*shulchan*). The argument of both *amoraim* is founded on the supposition that the succession of terms in the biblical text mirrors the historical chronology: before the fall of the Temple, the altar made expiation possible; after its destruction, this role is taken over by an individual's (*´adam*) table. Debating the Torah over the table is then a possible substitution for expiatory sacrifices, along with other activities such as prayer or study.[26]

This is an excellent example of the Torah's absolute centrality, a theme that was further elaborated to assimilate the Sages to "living Torot."[27] Entertaining a Sage is then analogous to entertaining the Torah, which itself amounts to performing a sacrifice. This appears in the following passage, with an explicit link between hospitality involving a scholar (*talmid chakham*) and a sacrificial action:

> *That passeth by us continually* [*tamid*] (2 Kings 4:9)—R. Jose son of R. Chanina[28] said in the name of R. Eliezer b. Jacob:[29] If a man [*´adam*] entertains a scholar [*talmid chakham*] in his house and lets him enjoy his possessions, Scripture accounts it to him as if he had sacrificed the daily burnt-offering [*temidin*]. (bT Berakhot 10b, tr. Epstein 1978a, 58)

Proving a statement using a biblical wordplay on *tamid* (which means both "perpetual" as an adjective and "perpetual sacrifice," one of the sacrifices once performed daily at the Temple, as a substantive), the passage presents a possible substitute for the ritual and concurrently legitimates a social practice—a lavish demonstration of hospitality entailing the partaking of the possessions involving "laics" (*´adam*) and "scholars" (*talmid chakham*).[30] Using the notion of *zekhut ´avot* (the merit of the Fathers) as a point of comparison, other texts emphasize the positive consequences that people can legitimately expect from a successful demonstration of hospitality toward Sages. The consequences are located both in the present world and in the future.[31] Provided it is conducted in a certain way, hospitality is functionally working as a ritual, recognized as a valid substitute for sacrificial practices along study and prayer.

The Brahmanical tradition has a number of important texts running along similar lines, insisting on the perfect equation between hospitality to a fellow Brahmin and different types of sacrifices. This begins in the very definition of the word for guest, *atithi*:

> A guest [*atithi*] comes blazing like a fire. When someone has studied one branch from each of the Vedas in accordance with the Law, he is called a "vedic scholar" [*śrotriya*]. When such a man comes to the home of a householder devoted to the Law proper to him—and he comes for no other purpose than to discharge the Law—then he is called a "guest." [*atithi*] (ĀpDh 2.(3).6.3–5, tr. Olivelle 2005, 83)

In this passage, a householder (*gṛhastha*) is required to welcome any learned scholar (*śrotriya*), restricting the notion of *atithi* to the *śrotriya* defined as someone—a Brahmin, to be sure—having put a particular emphasis on the study of the Veda. The comparison with fire at the beginning alludes to the fact that hospitality can be viewed, quite literally, as a sacrifice. As the fire is the regular place for a "real" sacrifice, the mouth of a *śrotriya* Brahmin consecrates and burns the food given to him. A number of texts connect various gestures of hospitality (the greeting, the washing of the feet, the preparation of food, etc.) to sacrificial actions. For example:

> This is the sacrifice to Prajāpati that a householder offers incessantly. . . . When milk is poured over it, that food is equal to an *agniṣṭoma* sacrifice; when ghee is poured over it, it is equal an *ukthya* sacrifice; when honey is poured over it, it is equal to an *atirātra* sacrifice; when meat is poured over it, it is equal to a *dvādaśāha* sacrifice[32]; and when water is poured over it, it procures the increase of progeny and a long life. (ĀpDh 2.(3).7.1; 4, tr. Olivelle 2000, 85, similar to Atharva Veda 9.6.40–44)

This brings yet another explanation as to why a meal is not a time for a light conversation, but rather a highly serious and codified time. The good unfolding of the ritual will either discharge the householder from a duty or bring him rewards for this life or the next. A deficient demonstration of hospitality brings a range of negative consequences, such as the loss to the disappointed guest of all one's positive actions (VDh 8.6, tr. Olivelle 2000, 383).

The association of hospitality with a complex retributive system is also evident in the notion of the five "great sacrifices" (*pañca mahāyajña*) that are prescribed to any householder (*gṛhastha*) and that include the daily reception of a Brahmin (*nṛyajña* or *manuṣyayajña*).[33] Known to achieve the same effects as costly solemn (*śrauta*) sacrifices, the "great sacrifices" are, strictly speaking, simple rituals, much easier and cheaper. This represents then a remarkable discount, probably in an attempt to counterbalance the growing influence of concurrent Buddhist, Jain, Cārvāka, and other groups.[34] From a Brahmanical point of view, these rituals have a triple advantage: (1) their practice is accessible to any (*dvija*, "twice-born") householder, Brahmin or not; (2) they are to be practiced daily; and (3) they imply a social obligation toward Brahmins. As such, the theological construct of the five "great sacrifices" is a powerful tool to exert an influence within the households of individual people.

This is analog to what we observed in the Rabbinic context, with a similar ritual legitimation of social practices (especially when they involve the reception of members of the learned elite), made accessible and prescribed to a broad audience.

Purity

Rules of purity represent another major theme in which ritual meanings and social practices are closely entangled. Here too, a ritual framework has been progressively transposed to individual households in both traditions. In the Rabbinic context, it has already been remarked long ago that secular meals have been "recoded" and were to be conducted "as if one was a Temple priest," implying that its participants should be in a state of purity.[35] Other aspects of purity rules, however, equally underwent a process of transposition and gained a new social relevance. This appears, for example, in the way texts deal with the social categories of *chaver*, the "companion," *ne´eman*, "a trustworthy person," and *`am ha-´aretz*, the "people of the land." In the Mishnah, even if the exact social referent of those terms has been much debated,[36] the two first categories generally refer to groups of particularly observant men in matters of purity and tithes. By contrast, the *`am ha-´aretz* is a person who consistently fails to respect those prescriptions. The Mishnah warns that a

person who wants to become a *chaver* should not entertain in his place an *`am ha-´aretz* who is wearing clothes.[37] The attention to clothes implies that not the interpersonal contact itself but purity concerns are the issue—and the cloth could defile other items in the *chaver*'s house by simple contact. In the later elaboration of such rules, the *chaver* represents a Sage and the *`am ha-´aretz*, a Jewish person outside of the Rabbinic circle, who stands out for his or her ignorance of the Torah. Ignorance, not the impurity of clothes, is then the important issue and the fear is that it could spread—even if one might wonder on the contrary whether the frequentation of learned men could not educate the ignorant.[38] Finally, impurity equally becomes an issue in the interaction with Gentiles. Whereas biblical literature does not envision them as potentially carrying any kind of ritual impurity,[39] this idea comes up in the early Rabbinic literature. Indeed, the Tosefta states that Gentiles can transmit the impurity of a *zav*[40] (Tosefta Zavim 2.1 and the discussion in Klawans 1995, 308)—a notion that has major theoretical consequences for social relations and whose formulation probably echoes frequent actual contacts, raising concerns among the Sages.

Indian texts equally emphasize the issue of purity and draw social consequences that are parallel to the situation observed in Rabbinic texts. The food, its preparation, and the contact with other persons during a meal are particularly sensitive. Food needs to undergo a process of transformation that makes it fit for a guest: among other actions, it is sprinkled with water and exposed to fire (BDhS 1.(5).10.2–3; 9). This has to be done out of the sight of the person for whom the food is cooked, in order to prevent any possible visual pollution, since impure food can contaminate other items or persons by a simple visual contact. Likewise, consuming food is a critical time, especially when the eater is a Brahmin and several guests are involved. If, for example, a *śūdra* touches a Brahmin while he is eating, he should immediately cease to eat, to prevent the impurity from spreading.[41] Purity is moreover one of the principles underlying the notion of a group or party (*paṅkti*): an ideal party is only composed of actors who share the same level of purity (or impurity).[42] A strong theological idea makes this prescription even more pressing: participating in a gathering involves sharing the respective "merits" of the other eaters.[43]

Returning on a comparative level, it seems that in both contexts, ritual behaviors associated to sacrifices and issues of purity were resemantized to construct a worldview that can speak to a larger and more diverse social reality. Ritual rules are then powerful tools in the hands of the religious elite to encourage some type of contacts rather than others, with a chain of correspondences connecting sacrifices, "religious knowledge" (and its specialists), and individual households. The equations differ from one text to another, mirroring changing social realities or simply diverging individual

perspectives. These correspondences situate the actors not only in a social context, but also in a broader, cosmic framework designed around a revealed tradition. It is probably why the ignorance of the traditional texts is one of the worst possible outrages one can cause against the tradition: it undermines the world the religious specialists are trying to construct.[44] This is explicitly formulated by the Mishna, which states that whoever does not know the Scriptures, is ignorant in matters of the Mishna, and does not observe etiquette (*derekh ʹeretz*) does not belong to the inhabited or civilized world (*yishshuv*) (M Qiddushin 1.10). Expressed in normative literature, the formulation of such views was perhaps all the more necessary because of numerous cases of people not complying with this ideal in the social reality. It, however, says a great deal about what a perfect world should be and about the urge to preserve or build it through appropriate social relations.

THE "DOMESTICIZATION OF RELIGION"

After this review of how both traditions deal with a similar theme, we need first to note a number of substantial differences. Diverging from the situation of sacrifices in the Rabbinic context, classical or elaborated forms of sacrifice (*śrauta*) did not suddenly disappear in the Brahmanical case, but were partly continued and partly replaced with more elementary rites (cf. Lubin 2002, 450). Similarly, domestic practices prescribed in Brahmanical texts are not a particularly "recent" creation, but are already mentioned in older texts, such as the Atharva Veda or the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. Another major difference appears in the respective visions of the ideal society mediated by the texts. Rabbinic texts defend a principle of equality and encourage the study of Torah among all—study being, in theory, a value related to personal choice and not one's social condition by birth. This principle is reflected in practices of commensality, in which a whole group partakes a meal—even if simultaneously reinforcing hierarchies. By contrast, the ideal Brahmanical society is defined by social roles acquired by birth and by a strict hierarchy. This appears in practices of precedence (guest and host not eating "together") or in the chain of leftovers.

Despite these significant differences, both traditions present us with remarkably similar trajectories that are, in turn, mirrored in the specifics of domestic rituals and practices. A first point to stress is, in both contexts, the role of interaction rituals that mark the boundaries of a special society. They create a temporary group composed of people who are external enough to the household's kernel to have to undergo them, as Goffman argued. A second point is the attention paid to various details in the unfolding of the relation, representing (and reinforcing) hierarchies that reflect the authority of teachers

and the centrality of religious knowledge. Finally, in both traditions, there is an elaborate theological strategy consisting in relating social practices to complex sacrificial rituals: this is the key of a process of "domesticizing religion," reminiscent of Norbert Elias's notion of a "civilizing process" and of the displacement of socio-religious issues and conflicts on practices such as etiquette.[45] This process can be tentatively described in the following terms for both traditions.

Around the second-third centuries, certain rabbis related a number of social and domestic practices to obsolete ritual gestures; along with study, prayers, charity, and so forth, household ceremonials underwent a process of ritualization and were considered as one (among other) valid substitute for sacrifices once offered in the Jerusalem Temple. The ritual aspect of domestic practices can hint at their centrality in the rebuilding of a tradition centered on the rabbis and their teachings. Arguably, travels and domestic hospitality played a major role in the very constitution of a "Rabbinic movement," structuring a group and its identity against competing groups, making it relevant and authoritative—for example in its legal and religious functions.[46] In a similar way, but for different reasons, Brahmanical texts focus on the household, asserting that domestic rituals performed by a householder achieve, in the end, an effect equivalent to more complicated and expensive rituals, such as solemn sacrifices. In so doing, the texts brush the contours of a new lifestyle, centered on the social unit of the household that breaks from Brahmanical elitism and broadens the audience.[47] This evolution suggests an actual need from Brahmanical groups to reassert their authority when important changes affect their position, for example, in their relation with kings.[48] The single fact that *dharmaśāstra* kept being read and commented as authoritative texts up to colonial times is probably a sign that this strategy worked.

One must add that, in both traditions, the genius of religious elites consisted in presenting this reconfiguration in a way that it is perceived as "self-evident" or transparent. The elaborated exegetical tools precisely contribute to preserve a tight relation with a corpus of texts conceived as revealed and an appearance of continuity despite the major changes that intervened in the respective socio-historical contexts.[49] Recognizing the houses of individuals and their bodies as available symbolic spaces, they were used to recode meanings about the society, and more generally about the order of the world. Creating rules that function as theatrical scripts, they shaped roles that the protagonists were expected to embody to their best and for which their honor was at risk. In the end, it can be assumed that the roles progressively and imperceptibly became *habitus*, contributing to actualize the wished perfect society.

ABBREVIATIONS

ĀpDh	Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra. In Olivelle 2000.
ARN	´Avot de-Rabbi Nathan. In Smilévitch 1983.
BDh	Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra. In Olivelle 2000.
bT	Babylonian Talmud.
Der	Derekh Eretz Rabba. In Van Loopik 1991.
Dez	Derekh Eretz Zuta. In Sperber 1990.
GDh	Gautama Dharma Sūtra in Olivelle 2000.
M	Mishna. In Neusner 1988.
MDh	Mānava Dharma Śāstra. In Olivelle 2005.
pT	Palestinian Talmud.
VDh	Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra. In Olivelle 2000.
YājñDh	Yājñavalkya Dharma Śāstra. In Vidyārṇava 1974.

NOTES

1. Smith (2000) has considerably worked on the idea of comparison as a way to refine the analytical vocabulary in the study of religion.

2. For Dez and Der, Van Loopik (1991, 9) observes: "The major part of the traditions from *Derekh 'Eretz Zuta* I-III and *Derekh 'Eretz Rabbah* III-XI and a number of statements from other parts of the tractates of *Derekh 'Eretz* must have been known quite some time before the Babylonian Talmud was finished in 500 C.E."

3. Stern (1994, 129) notes: "[R]abbinic writings account for the life of Israel only as it should be in an ideal world." This is comparable to what Olivelle (2000, 17) says about Dharmasūtras: "The Dharmasūtras are normative texts. They contain norms of correct behavior and action. They tell people what to do; they do not tell us what people actually did."

4. Sivertsev (2005, 211) gives a good overview of the history of research on these aspects.

5. Parallel texts can be found in pT Demai 4:6, 24a and bT Chullin 94a.

6. Michaels (1997, 253–258) discusses this ritual, focusing on the analogy with gift/counter-gift transaction.

7. ĀpDh 2.(4).8.1 (tr. Olivelle 2000, 85): "If a person has already paid his respects to a guest whom he has provided with accommodation, thereafter he does not have to rise up or get off his couch to greet him."

8. This appears clearly in ĀpDh 2.(4).9.1–4 (tr. Olivelle 2000, 87): "On the next day he should satisfy that guest to his heart's content and follow him as he leaves. If a guest has come in a carriage, he should follow him as far as the carriage; others he should follow until they give him leave to return. If a guest forgets to do so, he may turn back at the village boundary."

9. Age is, of course, to be conceived both in terms of "absolute" age and knowledge or experience, as observes Sperber (1990, 68): "'Seniority' itself . . . can be defined according to different criteria, such as age, importance or function."

10. DEZ 6.3 and Tosefta Ber 5.5, with the comments of Sperber (1990, 67) and Hezser (1997, 560), give further considerations about the use of seats and beds.

11. Hezser (1997, 336) observes: "While teachers are likely to have prepared banquets or *symposia* for their students on particular occasions only, they will have shared their regular meals with them quite often. Students who served food to their teachers perhaps took their meals when their teachers had finished theirs."

12. Pitt-Rivers (1997) has emphasized the crucial role of the logics of shame/honor in the context of Mediterranean societies. As reflected in our examples (Jewish and Indian, Palestinian and Babylonian, etc.), it is however unlikely that these issues have any proper Mediterranean specificity.

13. A similar concern is expressed about avoiding a reputation of "glutton" (*gargeran*): see bT Pessachim 86b (the visit of Rav Huna to the house Rav Nachman b. Isaac) and Dez 6.4 (tr. Sperber 1990, 85–86).

14. One such aristocratic circle was that of the "pure of Jerusalem" (*neqiye ha-da`at*) whose practices—probably extinct at the time of the texts' composition—are described in bT Sanhedrin 23a and 30a, Dez 5.2, etc.

15. In the text's utopian world, the society is exclusively composed of four *varṇa*, ignoring the multiplicity of *jāti*, with the exception of discussions about the outcomes of mixed marriages (*anuloma* and *pratiloma*, MDh 10.1–73).

16. The Sanskrit term qualifying the seat is "*na abahupāda*" ("which does not have a small number of feet"), meaning a good chair and not a footstool or on the ground. The social importance of seats has been emphasized by Leslie (1989, 184) and Jamison (1996, 159–160) who refers to examples in Mahābhārata 5.87.18, 5.89.8, 5.92.37, 5.92.45, etc. This aspect is also explicitly expressed in GDh 11.7, where a king is told to seat on a higher seat than visiting Brahmins.

17. MDh 4.29–30 (tr. Olivelle 2005, 125): "No guest should stay at his house without being honored with a seat, food, and a bed, or with water, roots, and fruits, according to his ability. He must never honor the following even with a word of welcome: ascetics of heretical sects (*pāṣaṇḍinas*); individuals engaging in improper activities (*vikarmasthān*), observing the 'cat vow,' (*baiḍālavratikān*), or following the way of herons (*bakavṛttīn*); hypocrites (*śaṭhān*); and sophists (*haitukān*)."

18. The ritual is extensively described in MDh 3.124–255.

19. The *śloka* of MDh 3.133 (tr. Olivelle 2005, 115) details the negative consequences that follow the invitation of an ignorant person: after his death and as a *preta*, a householder will swallow as many spikes, spears, and iron-balls as mouthfuls of food for the gods and *pitṛ* that were ingested by an ignorant guest.

20. MDh 3.266–3.272 gives a list of dishes associated to their respective merits. Fish is supposed to feed the ancestors for two months, gazelle meat for three, lamb for four, and bird meat for five. Jamison (1996, 181–182) describes this ritual logic, referring to Mahābhārata 13.92.3, where gods and *pitṛ* are fed up to the point of suffering from indigestion.

21. Malamoud (1989, 20) observes: "It seems, then, that the leftover is always consummated by a class of beings which is inferior to the one which starts to consummate the mass of food." The theme of the consumption of leftovers has been discussed in detail by Wezler (1978).

22. The commentator Haradatta adds that a person behaving in such a way is called a "meal-troublemaker" (*bhojanakaṇṭaka*, tr. Bühler 1879, 61).

23. On this process, McClymond (2008, 155) suggests that such a transition was possible precisely because "certain procedures that were part of traditional sacrifice persist in internalized sacrifice."

24. According to tradition, the second century *tanna*.

25. Other texts suggest that households were used as "academies" or places for Torah study (Hezser 1997, 185 *sqq.* and 559 and Sivertsev 2002, 161–183).

26. The same reasoning appears in bT Berakhot 55a, in the names of R. Yochanan and R. ´El`azar.

27. On this equation, Neusner (1970, 3) notes that "[the rabbi] *was* Torah, not merely because he lived by it, but because at his best he constituted as compelling an embodiment of the heavenly model, as did a Torah scroll itself." Neusner (1989, 202) also remarked, about ARN: "The sage is now . . . not judge and teacher alone but also a supernatural figure."

28. According to tradition, the late third century CE Palestinian *amora*, disciple of R. Yochanan in Tiberiades.

29. According to tradition, the second century CE *tanna*, a disciple of R. `Aqiva and a colleague of Sages of the ´Usha generation.

30. The same pattern is also visible in narratives praising hospitality (*´akhsanya*) in bT Berakhot 63b. For example: "R. Eliezer the son of R. Jose the Galilean began to speak in praise of hospitality, expounding the verse, *And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his house . . . because of the Ark of God* (Deuteronomy 23:8). Have we not here an argument *a fortiori*? If such was the reward for attending to the ark which does not eat or drink, but before which he merely swept and laid the dust, how much more will it be for one who entertains a scholar in his house and gives him to eat and drink and allows him the use of his possessions!" (tr. Epstein 1978a, 402).

31. Many lists (Tosefta Soṭa 4.1–6, Midrash Genesis Rabba 48.10, bT Bava Metzi`a 86b, etc.) associate each gesture of Abraham in his reception of the three "angels" (Genesis 18) to a triple retribution, in the desert (*ba-midbar*), in the settlement in Canaan (*be-yishshuv*), and in the future (*le`atid lavo´*). The reward does not reach Abraham himself but the entirety of Israel.

32. All sacrifices mentioned there are related to soma pressings and are derived from the sacrifice of *agniṣṭoma*—a major sacrifice performed for Agni, requiring the presence of sixteen priests, lasting five days and involving three soma pressings. Even if the correspondences are not all obvious, the text proceeds in an increasing order: ghee is better than milk, honey is better than ghee, and meat associated to the particularly long and costly *dvādaśāha* sacrifice is better than honey.

33. According to MDh 3.50, the five *mahāyajña* are: sacrifice to the gods (offering food in the fire, *homa*); sacrifice to the beings (oblation of food on the soil, *bali*);

sacrifice to the ancestors (libation of water, *tarpaṇa*); sacrifice to the Veda (recitation of Vedic mantras); sacrifice to fellow humans (receiving an *atithi*).

34. On this principle, Alles (2000, 123) observes: "At other periods the quantity of economically significant goods presented to non-empirical beings diminishes, so that, in economic terminology, religious benefits are sold at a discount, sometimes a tremendous discount." Olivelle (1993, 53–55) gives a good overview of the theology involved in the *mahāyajña*.

35. Neusner (1973, 65–66) writes: "The Pharisees held . . . that even outside of the Temple, in one's home, a person had to follow the laws of purity in the only circumstance in which they might apply, namely, at the table. They therefore held one must eat his secular food, that is, ordinary, everyday meals, in a state of purity *as if one were a Temple priest*. . . . The table of every Jew in his home was seen to be like the table of the Lord in the Jerusalem Temple. The commandment, 'You shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy people,' was taken literally." The comparison of the table with the altar in the above-examined text (bT Chagiga 27a) is an excellent instance of this logic.

36. Lieberman (1952), Neusner (1972), and Schiffman (1983) have worked extensively on the *chaverim* and their relations to the Pharisees. Jaffé (2002) gives a good review of the different positions on the *`ammei ha-´aretz* expressed in research. On the amoraic interpretation of *chaver*, Hezser (1997, 316) remarks: "It seems that in amoraic traditions the terms רבח and איירבח refer to all those who were 'friends' with particular rabbis, who sympathized with their teachings, whether they were rabbis themselves, sages who were not rabbis, or students."

37. M Demai 2.3 (tr. Neusner 1988, 37–38): "3 He who undertakes to be a *haber* ["comrade," "fellow," "member," "associate"; member of a group that scrupulously observes the laws of Levitical cleanness], . . . does not accept the hospitality of an *am haarets*, and does not receive him [the *am haarets*] as his guest while he [the *am haarets*] is wearing his [the *am haarets'*] own clothes."

38. The fear of ignorance spreading is illustrated in a story told in bT Bava Batra 8a: Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi invited people at his place and one of the guests admitted not knowing anything about the Torah. Regretting to have invited him—the story continues—the ignorant person turned out to be Rabbi Yonathan b. ´Amran who had dissimulated his knowledge by modesty.

39. Klawans (1995, 289–291) established an important distinction between moral (consecutive to a deliberate negative action) and ritual impurity (consecutive to natural phenomena, such as menstruation), observing that Gentiles are not concerned by the latter in Biblical literature.

40. A *zav* is a person impure from semen loss.

41. ĀpDhS 1.(5).16.33–17.1 (tr. Olivelle 2000, 53): "33 If, while eating, 1 he is touched by a Śūdra, he should stop eating. 2 He should not eat seated alongside ignoble people; 3 or in a place where, while the group is eating, one of them may get up and give away his leftovers or sip water."

42. On this point, the Mitākṣarā *ad* YājñDh 1.168 (tr. Vidyārṇava 1974, 265) specifies that one can separate "parties" by using water or ashes to make them independent purity-wise.

43. As writes Kane (1930–1962, vol. 2.2, 759), "when several persons sit down to dinner in a continuous row, the sins one of them is guilty of attach to the others in the same row." This principle is explicitly expressed in ĀpDhS 2.(3).6.19–20.

44. It could be interesting to compare the Rabbinic treatment of ignorance and ignorants with the notion of *avidyā* in Hindu traditions, even if Brahmanical normative texts are dealing rather with the concern of a lack of Vedic knowledge than with the notion of someone ignoring the world's true reality (but both types of ignorance are arguably related).

45. Bornet (2010, 227–233) has developed a concept of "domesticization of religion," building on the works of Elias (1978) about a "civilizing process" and Schürmann (1994) about how social rituals create temporary communities, such as a "meal community" ("Speisegemeinschaft," 153) and a "community of salutation" ("Grussgemeinschaft," 157). Goody's criticism (2007, 154–179) of Elias's perfectly Eurocentric views is absolutely legitimate and even substantiated by the present example.

46. Catherine Hezser has compared the "rabbinic movement" to "personal alliance networks" (1997, 238–239) and recently emphasized the importance of travels (and hence temporary stays) for the development of Rabbinic influence (Hezser 2011).

47. On this, Lubin notes (2002, 451): ". . . I propose that the brahmin priesthood sought to consolidate and extend its support among the middle rungs of rural society by encouraging the study of Vedic texts by a wider range of classes, and by remodeling and standardizing household ritual in imitation of the *śrauta* priestly cult through the promulgation of codes of household ritual, the *gṛhya sūtras*." Bronkhorst (2011, 66) observes: "Among the methods used by the new Brahmanism to attain its goal we must count the adoption of a new life-style . . . and the composition of literary works that address both a brahmanical and a non-brahmanical audience to emphasize the features and claims that Brahmins presented as rightfully and inherently theirs. All these tools share one feature: they all deny that the new Brahmanism is new at all." A similar process is described by Lubin (2006, 86).

48. On the defensive posture perceivable in most Brahmanical normative texts and especially in MDh, Olivelle (2005, 39) remarks: "Reading the *MDh* one cannot fail to see and to feel the intensity and urgency with which the author defends Brahmanical privilege."

49. On this process of reconfiguration, Lubin (2002, 456–457) observes: "In the course of events, these virtuoso exegetes, endowed with the authority of revelation, provide a basis for transferring the sanctity and power of the priestly office when changing circumstances affect the support or continuance of that office to the wider community by making textual study or recitation, as well as other forms of household ceremonial, equivalent to the priestly high cult."

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Part II

ETHICS

Chapter 4

Dharma and Halacha

Reflections on Hindu and Jewish Ethics

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One of the strongest links between Judaism and Hinduism is that of ethics. Both religions share a deep commitment to practicing a detailed and particular way of life. Whereas Hinduism has developed detailed *Dharma Śāstra* literature,[1] Judaism has developed *Halacha*, which is similarly particular and detailed. Both *Dharma* and *Halacha* carry a notion of intertwining Ethics and Religion; Dharma conveys the notions of Duty, Law, Order, Religion, Justice, and Morality; and *Halacha* carries similar such notions. Both *Dharma* and *Halacha* literature seem to be offering an interpretation to their ancient sources of inspiration; *Dharma* follows the underlying assumptions of the six orthodox schools,[2] whereas the *Halacha* follows the biblical commandments. A careful look reveals that there are similarities there too; considering the *Yama-Niyama*[3] ethics to be at the core of the Hindu ethical system, one may observe that the five *yamas* are somewhat similar to five out of the Ten Commandments and, as such, it seems that there are similar ethical foundations in both traditions. Apparently, modern approaches to India and in particular to Hinduism have focused on metaphysics at the expense of ethics and, as such, Hinduism was often seen to be concerned with the esoteric, the otherworldly, the mystical, as opposed to ethical issues and concerns. In contrast, Judaism and Christianity were thought to offer something lacking in Hinduism, namely the moral vitality of the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament, and it was this moral vitality that many Christian missionaries saw themselves bringing to India to challenge an ethically lax Hinduism (Coward, Lipner, and Young 1989, 1).

In general, Jewish ethics are rooted in a perspective distinct from Western liberalism, and understand the individual's relations to the family and community through the notion of duty. Western ethics, shaped as they were by the Western liberalism that emerged from enlightenment philosophers such as

John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, are based upon a system of morals grounded in the notion of individual rights. As such, Thomas Jefferson embraced this view in writing the US Declaration of Independence, and quoted Locke in asserting this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, which they are endowed by their Creator by some unalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." As opposed to the idea of individual rights as the bedrock of morality, which apparently was "self-evident" to Enlightenment thinkers, Judaism perceives the individual as a member of a community bound by duties, rather than a rights-deserving individual. As such, whereas the focus in Western ethics may be on individual autonomy, the focus of Jewish ethics is on familial and communal responsibility (Dorff and Crane 2013, 2).

Examining Hinduism, one finds a similar notion of duty to be underlying ethics. The main Hindu term denoting ethics is "*Dharma*," and the notion of duty is realized within this framework encompassing various ethical prescriptions or commandments. In general, the term "*dharma*" is untranslatable in that it has no direct semantic equivalents in any western languages that convey the resonance of associations expressed by the term. However, it has been variously translated as "duty," "religion," "justice," "law," "ethics," "religious merit," "principle," and "right" (Flood 1996, 52).[4] The noun *dharma* is derived from the verbal root *dhṛ*, which means "uphold, maintain, sustain, and keep in balance." Hence *dharma* is the way, the right way, to maintain order and balance in the universe generally. At the human level, *dharma* governs every aspect of and every activity in the life of a Hindu (Rocher 2003, 102). As such, *dharma* is an all-encompassing ideology which embraces both ritual and moral behavior, whose neglect would have bad social and personal consequences (Flood 1996, 53).

Dharma has also a wider, universal implication or significance, as it ties together individual ethics, social and political ethics, spirituality as well as cosmology; it retains the sense of a cosmic status quo or a healthy and natural universal state of affairs. *Dharma* is not only external to the human being, rather it is perceived as comprising the essence or nature of everything. As such, it aspires to place everything—not only the human being but the whole of phenomena, in its proper place. As long as every element in the cosmos—the sun, water, animals, plants, and humans in particular—acts according to its *dharma*, the overall balance is maintained. However, as soon as any element in the cosmos in some way deviates from its *dharma*, i.e., commits *adharma*, the overall balance is disturbed (Rocher 2003, 102). Following this wider universal understanding, *dharma* should not be thought of as something static, but as a balance that is constantly being struck. It retains the connotation of powerful activity operating in the universe, and even constituting this universe, representing its essence or idealized form. The ethical

state represented by *dharma* is a kind of a natural law governing all existent beings in the universe. Accordingly, the ethical action is not just a contingent moral act, rather an innate characteristic of a human being, which makes that person what he or she is, assigning the part he or she is to play in the universal concert. From the wider perspective, it is the *dharma* of the sun to shine, of the pole to be fixed, of the rivers to flow, of the cow to yield milk, of the Brahmin (priest) to officiate and teach, of the *kṣatriya* (ruler) to rule, of the *vaiśya* (farmer) to farm (Van Buitenen 1957, 36).

This may be illustrated by a paragraph from the *Bhagavad gītā*, which highlights the importance of adhering to one's *dharmic* duty, even at the expense of one's life:

> By adhering to *dharmic* duty alone have Janaka and others attained success; considering the welfare of the world, you should do likewise. Whatever a great man does, common men indeed follow, and whatever standard he sets, the whole world accepts. O Pārtha, I myself am not obliged to perform any duty in all the three worlds, and have nothing more to attain—still I adhere to *dharma*. For was I ever to avoid tirelessly doing so, all mankind would follow my path. Had I ceased adhering to my duties, all these worlds would have perished, and I would have caused miscegenation among the classes, as well as destroyed the hosts of creatures. Just as the unwise perform their duties out of interest, the wise do so disinterestedly, desiring the welfare of the world. The wise one should not unsettle the ignorant whose minds are attached to different activities, rather he should encourage them to perform their duties and thus enjoy all sorts of action, while he himself acts in a controlled manner. Better to be deficient in following one's own *dharmic* duty, than to perform another's duty well; even death while performing one's own duty is better, for following another's duty invites danger. (Theodor 2010, 46–47)[5]

The speaker in this paragraph is the Supreme Lord, saying how important it is to follow *dharma* and its injunctions, and illustrating this by his personal example, in that even he himself follows *dharma* for the sake of giving example to the general public. The paragraph ends with the famous statement, according to which one should stick to one's *dharmic* duty even to the point of death.

The commandments of *dharma* include ideals for human life in this world, one's relation to other human beings, the duties of caste (*varṇa*), and the stages of life (*āśramas*) (Coward et al. 1989, 2). However, beside the particular rules there are general ethical rules called *sādhāraṇa dharma* and that may be translated as "general principles of conduct." This term is applied to ethical principles and forms of self-restraint that are considered "common to all," or universal (*sādhāraṇa*), as opposed to the particularistic ethics associated with *varṇāśrama dharma*. Various lists exist, many of them echoing the restraints

(*yama*) associated with the renouncer groups and practitioners of yoga. The principle element is often nonviolence or non-harming (*ahiṁsā*), accompanied by truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), and various bodily and emotional restraints (Johnson, 2009). More specifically, the yoga school lists five such ethical principles; these are very widely spread within Hinduism, are grouped under the name *yama* (restraints), and considered *sādhāraṇa dharma.* The *yamas* are nonviolence, truthfulness, refrainment from stealing, celibacy, and renunciation of unnecessary possessions. From the five *yamas* listed here, *ahiṁsā*, nonviolence, the principle motto of Gandhi's noncooperation approach, is the *yama* singled out by the commentators of the *Yoga Sūtra* and their author, Patañjali for special attention. In traditional methods of scriptural interpretation, introductory (and concluding) statements carry more weight than other statements; *ahiṁsā* is the most important *yama* say the commentators and therefore leads the list. In his commentary upon the *Yoga Sūtra,* Vyāsa accordingly takes *ahiṁsā* as the root of the other *yamas*. He defines it as not injuring any living creature anywhere at any time. Just as the footprints of an elephant cover the footprints of all other creatures, says Vijñānabhikṣu, so does *ahiṁsā* cover all the other *yamas* (Bryant 2009, 243).

BIBLICAL ETHICS AND THEIR HINDU COUNTERPART

Similar to the Hindu concept of ethics, which is deeply grounded in religion, the Tanakh's term for ethics is *yir'at elohim,* translated as "fear of God"; it points to the blurred boundaries in ancient Israel between ethics and religion. A paramount element in the proper worship of Israel's God is action in the social realm to relieve the oppression of the poor and powerless, and to prevent corruption of the judicial process. Further, many of God's commandments are intended to deter the Israelite from acting toward his fellow with vengeance and malice (Goodfriend 2013, 35). Moreover, the centrality of ethics is indicated by the placement of the command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" at the midpoint of the Torah (Lev. 19.18). Indeed, in the Torah both ethics and ritual are viewed as vital components of holiness (Goodfriend 2013, 35). A closer look into the sources of ethical behavior in the Torah reveals that seven out of eight such sources are directly linked to God, and represent both collective and individual relations with him; these eight are: (1) Collective reward and punishment, (2) individual reward and punishment, (3) gratitude to God, (4) Israel's experience as slaves and strangers, (5) Israel's special covenant with God with its aspiration to holiness, (6) the inherent morality and wisdom of God and His laws, (7) Israel's dependence on God, and (8) the mutual love between God and Israel (Goodfriend 2013, 38–41).

A classic example of such relational discipline appears in the traditions centered on and developed from the Jewish notion of *mitsva* ("commandment," pl. *mitzvot*), a rule of discipline that is understood to have divine sanction. The rabbinic tradition of Judaism notes that God has given the people of Israel 613 commandments outlining the 248 positive instructions and 365 negative injunctions the people are obliged to honor. The most general and most familiar of the *mitzvot* are known as the Ten Commandments (*Exodus* 20:2–14 and *Deuteronomy* 5:6–18); these offer the basic principle of Israelite law (Goodfriend 2013, 36–37) and combine strict monotheistic ideology with rules against destructive social behavior. According to these rules of discipline, the people of Israel are to believe in no other god but Yahveh, not to construct idols, to keep the commandments, not to misuse God's name, to observe the day of rest, to honor their parents, not to commit murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to testify falsely against their neighbors, and not to be envious of other people's possessions (Mahony, 1986, 27).

The Ten Commandments (or the Decalogue) appear twice in the Hebrew scriptures, at *Exodus* 20:2–13 and at *Deuteronomy* 5:6–17. There are differences between the two listings, but the order and the general contents are substantially identical. The commandments may be grouped as follows: Commandments 1–3: God's self-identification, followed by commandments against the worship of other gods, idolatry, and misuse of the divine name. Commandments 4–5: positive commands to observe the Shabbath and to honor parents. Commandments 6–7: prohibitions of violent acts against neighbors, namely killing and adultery. Commandments 8–10: prohibitions of crimes against community life, namely stealing, testifying falsely, and hankering after the life and goods of neighbors (Harrelson 1986, 395).

In contrast to the ordinary laws whose enactment depends on particular or social circumstances such as sacrifices offered in various conditions, the ordinances of the Decalogue apply to everybody regardless of circumstances. Every Israelite is committed not to practice idolatry and not to swear falsely and so forth; the commandments have thus universal validity (Weinfeld 1986, 487). The Ten Commandments provide God's universal and timeless standard of right and wrong, unlike the other 603 commandments in the Torah. They form the basis of Jewish law and, moreover, the Jewish tradition considers the Ten Commandments the theological basis for the rest of the commandments; a number of works starting with Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon have made groupings of the other 603 commandments according to their links with the Ten Commandments.

As already mentioned, similar to the Decalogue, there are certain moral precepts in Hinduism that are supposed to be common to all humankind. These are the *sādhāraṇa dharma* principles, which share a number of

features in common with the Ten Biblical Commandments (Klostermaier 2007, 138). As mentioned, such *sādhāraṇa* or general and universal moral principles are the ten principles of *yama* and *niyama*; moreover, examining the five later commandments and the five principles of *yama*, one finds a striking similarity. As such, *ahiṁsā* or the principle of nonviolence is parallel to the commandment "thou shall not kill." *Satya* or the principle of adhering to the truth is parallel to the commandment "thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor." *Asteya* or the principle of non-stealing is parallel to the commandment "thou shall not steal." *Brahmacarya* or the principle of celibacy is parallel to the commandment "thou shall not commit adultery." *Aparigraha* or the principle of non-accumulation is parallel to the commandment "thou shall not covet your neighbor's possessions."

To a large extent, the principle of *ahiṁsā* is the foundation upon which all the other nine principles of *yama* and *niyama* are founded. While it is true that in Hinduism this principle never enjoyed the unambivalent status it had in the Jaina and Buddhist traditions,[6] it still exerted a powerful influence on the Hindu mind with reference to particularly vulnerable forms of life. Revitalized in contemporary times by the example of M. K. Gandhi, this principle traditionally applied to all living beings. It had a twofold aspect: negative, that is, avoiding violence in thought and deed; and positive, being well-disposed toward in thought and deed (Lipner 1989, 59).

ETHICS BEING GROUNDED IN THE SACRIFICIAL ETHOS

In examining both Judaism and Hinduism, it is apparent that in both traditions ethics are indeed deeply grounded in the sacrificial ethos. This may not come as a surprise as both cultures have had a long sacrificial tradition out of which both religions have emerged and developed. As such, ancient Judaism had the tent of congregation at its liturgical center, and later it was replaced by the first and second temples and their sacrificial ethos; similarly, ancient Hinduism was deeply *Vedic* and as such grounded in the sacrificial culture. As such, both traditions share this deep link between sacrificial purity and ethical purity. There is, however, one notable and fundamental difference between the two systems: wherein Judaism considers ethics to be personal, that is, to be grounded in direct relations with the Supreme, for Hinduism ethics are generally impersonal, as they are not necessarily grounded in personal relations with the Supreme Lord.

In general, the offering of sacrifices in Judaism is meant to ensure God's presence among the people of Israel. However, offering the sacrifices is not the only condition that ensures God's presence and care; sacrifices must be offered correctly in accordance with God's directives, and the people

must behave properly and must follow God's way through following his commands. In other words, the validity or value of the sacrifices is based upon their purity, in both ritualistic and moral terms. Stated differently, ethics have not only a moral but a sacrificial or ritualistic significance, and as such in the Levitical discourse, a proper sacrifice includes the avoidance of both ritual impurity as well as moral impurity. This is because these two forms of impurity can drive God from his house, lead him to abandon his people and the land, and thereby imperil them both. As such, when the Israelites commit ritual or moral sins, even outside of the holy precincts of the *Mishkan*, God's presence in the *Mishkan* is placed in jeopardy. This explains the function of purifying and purging the people of Israel of their ritual and moral impurities, which is to remove the stain of sin and allow the people once more to be in intimate contact with God, as ritual and moral impurities place a barrier between God and human (Kepnes 2013, 94). Although the Jewish people no longer have a temple and no longer offer sacrifices, it is important to see that the function of the sacrificial cult has been preserved in the *halakhic* sytem, which includes the synagogue liturgies of today (Kepnes 2013, 95).

Similar to Judaism, in Hinduism there is a deep linkage between sacrifice and ethics, and moreover, the notion of *Dharma* is deeply associated with the sacrificial *Vedic* ethos. Similar to Judaism, the *Vedic* society was world affirming and sacrifices as well as rituals occupied a central place in its affairs. The individual enjoyed full dignity in so far as he was a *yajamāna,*[7] and the *Mīmāṁsā* school promoting these ideas was indeed humanistic and active. As opposed to Judaism, early *Mīmāṁsā* did not consider the Supreme Person to be a very important subject matter (Raju 1960, 207). As a realistic school, the *Mīmāṁsā's* main interest was mainly practical rather than speculative, as it inquired into the nature and means of *Dharma* (Sharma 2001, 59). The fundamental philosophical basis is Jaimini's *Mīmāṁsā Sūtras*[8] and the major commentators are *Śabara,*[9] *Kumārila Bhaṭṭa*, and *Prabhākara*[10]. Jaimini admits the reality of the *Vedic* Deities to whom the sacrifices were offered; as far as the Supreme Person, he does not argue for his existence neither denies him, but mainly ignores him. The *Mīmāṁsā* perceived human life as a life of action and, thus, life was expressed through action; however, action wasn't just any action but it was action under the *Vedic* injunctions. The *Veda* itself was taken to be *apauruṣeya*, that is, not composed by any person, not even by a Supreme Person, who was taken to be superfluous in the presence of the eternal *Veda*. The *Mīmāṁsā* was the "most orthodox of all the orthodox systems" (Raju 1960, 208) and accepted by all other schools as authoritative as far as the individual's relations to society, forefathers, teachers, and gods. The framework underlying proper human action as well as the person's relations with society and the world was *dharma*, and thus the *Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* of Jaiminī commences as follows: "Next, therefore, comes

the enquiry into *dharma. Dharma* is that which is indicated by means of the *Veda* as conducive to the highest good."[11] In the *Mīmāṁsā* system, there is a connection between the act and its result or fruit; as such, an act performed at present will yield a future result, while at the meantime it takes the form of *apūrva,*[12] which may be taken as an imperceptible antecedent of the fruit or an after-state of the act itself. Liberation for *Mīmāṁsā* refers mainly to life in heaven, although later thinkers did take *dharma* to be leading to *mokṣa* (liberation).

The *Mīmāṁsā* accepts the existence of the soul, distinct from the mind, body, and senses. The soul is the essence of human personality and there is a plurality of souls; it is the agent in each action and experience, and the resting place of *apūrva*. Being eternal, it allows the reaping of action's fruits in a future life. Still, *Mīmāṁsā* doesn't aim at deconstructing the human person, and the physical body is no object of contempt, as it is an important instrument in pursuing *dharma*. Moreover, it approves of human volition as a positive force, motivating one to *pravṛtti*, or action according to *dharma*. The *Mīmāṁsā* thus represents a holistic human approach, and with its realistic grandstand and its humanistic and activist ethics, it places the human being at the center of the universe, while being deeply committed to human welfare (Sharma 2001, 61). The centrality of human welfare serves as an impetus for the human being to control the world in order to fulfill his or her desires, and the instrument for achieving this is the *Vedic* sacrifice; action has to be performed, as only then are the gods pleased and when proper enjoyment is obtained for them, the natural forces and the world yield to the human wishes (Raju 1960, 220). The later commentators differ in their relation to the fulfillment of desires; whereas Kumārila holds that one should adhere to *dharma* as that would lead to happiness and exterminate sorrow, Prabhākara maintains that *dharma* should be followed for its own sake, without regarding possible gains or consequences. As such, the notion of ethics in *Mīmāṁsā* is humanistic, realistic, active, and defined by adherence to *dharma.* Self-fulfillment is defined in terms of sacrifice, and it can be measured in terms of worldly success, in this life as well as in the next.

THE *KABALA* AND HINDU LADDER OF ETHICS

The similarities between Hindu and Jewish ethics or between *dharma* and *halacha* have yet another, more internal or mystical dimension, highlighted by both *kabala* and the *bhakti* traditions. Accordingly, ethics represent the lower stages of a ladder leading to holiness, mystical union, and love of God. This requires a deeper look into the theologies of two notable eighteenth-century thinkers, who in articulating their systems, have both offered interpretations

to ancient classical texts. Viśvanātha Cakravartī was a *Vaiṣṇava*[13] author who lived around the years 1640–1730[14]; he grew up in present-day West Bengal at the Nadia district, and later moved to Rādhā Kuṇḍa at the Mathurā district, which was an important center for *Vaiṣṇava* scholarship. He wrote about twenty books on *Vaiṣṇava* theology, and his book *Sārārtha-Varṣinī-Ṭīkā* is his commentary on the *Bhagavad gītā*.[15] Rabbi Moshe Haim Luzzatto known as the Ramhal was his contemporary and lived in the years 1707–1746; he was an Italian Kabalist and philosopher, who wrote about forty books. His book *Mesillat Yesharim* is his treatise on ethics, and offers a commentary on a Baraitha[16] attributed to Rabbi Pinhas.

The ethical doctrine articulated by the Ramhal is grounded in the Kabalisitic doctrine of sublimating daily activities as a path for releasing the encaged sparks or souls from this material world and returning them to their divine origin; as such, elevation doesn't take place only through prayers, rather throughout one's secular life and throughout one's daily activities. Seen in this light, human life becomes a holy mission of discrimination and all one's actions become sacred. Accordingly, each and every action performed, not only sacred or liturgical action, but daily and trivial as well, should be performed out of a deep spiritual intention and with a deep sense of a mission, of releasing the encaged sparks from this material world and of returning them to their divine origin. Seen in this light, each and every action or work carries a mystic dimension to it, which is a scrutinization or discrimination of spirit from matter (Jacobson 1984, 60). Seen in this light, it seems that the Ramhal's purpose in *Mesilat Yesharim* is to articulate or pave the path of devotion and holiness through the means of ethics (Shriki 2011, 126–127).

Similar to the Ramhal whose book offers a commentary on an ancient work, Viśvanātha's book also offers an interpretation to the ancient and classic *Bhagavad gītā*. Although there are various ways of reading the *Bhagavad gītā*,[17] Viśvanātha's commentary takes an approach quite similar to the Ramhal, and highlights the doctrine of *karma-yoga.* This doctrine is similarly grounded in daily activities, and specifically activities that are grounded in *dharma*, or prescribed duties; it considers the daily activities to be a gate for liberation, in that action could be gradually sublimated or purified. As such, the same prescribed duty that could be performed in an egoistic and self-centered state of mind could also be performed out of a sense of duty and without attachment to its results or fruits. It could be further sublimated and performed as a dedication or devotional offering to the Supreme and when further sublimated and performed in the highest stage it could express pure devotion or a state of pure love of God.

In examining the ethical doctrines of both Viśvanātha Cakravartī and the Ramhal, a striking similarity appears. Both ethical systems are grounded in a ladder-like structure, having its root in the performance of the various

religious commandments, which are the *mitzvot* for the Jewish tradition, and the *Vedic* commandments or *viddhis* for the Hindu tradition. These commandments, that is, the *mitzvot* and *viddhis* serve as the foundation for both *dharma* and *halacha*, respectively. Both ladders take these rules as points of departure; then, the practitioner ascends step by step until he reaches the summit, which is deeply absorbed in holiness, or pure love of God..

These two parallel worldviews are deeply grounded in an intricate set of rules that govern the individual and communal life. However, the focus of both systems is upon a process of "self-transcendence," a term referring to the transformation one undergoes in one's progress from the finite realm to the infinite realm (Ward 1998, 153). In this process the individual gradually sublimates or purifies his or her attitude or internal position in regards to these rules; whereas a beginner would follow these rules in a somewhat self-centered or egoistic state of mind, the more one makes progress in ascending this ethical ladder, the more one renounces these self-centered and egoistic states of mind, to be replaced by more contemplative and God conscious ones. In other words, both systems articulate a somewhat similar ladder or path that leads the individual step by step from worldly-mindness to holiness, or from a self-centered and somewhat egoistic state of mind, through a transformation of being to a state of deep devotion to God.

Ramhal's ladder consists of nine stages and, as mentioned, is a commentary on a Talmudic text attributed to Rabi Pinchas; this Baraitha appears in the chapter "Before their festivals"[18] and reads:

> Thus we read in the oft quoted baraita of Rabbi Phinehas ben Yair, "The knowledge of Torah leads to watchfulness, watchfulness to zeal, zeal to cleanliness, cleanliness to abstinence, abstinence to purity, purity to saintliness, saintliness to humility, humility to the fear of sin, and fear of sin leads to holiness." (Kaplan 1966, 17–18)

Viśvanātha's ethical ladder is less articulate or more implicit than that of the Ramhal; however, reading through his commentary definitely reveals that such a ladder indeed explicitly exists. His ladder consists of three main stages—*sakāma-karma*, *niṣkāma karma*, and *bhakti*. *Sakāma-karma* means literally following the *Vedic* rules with a desire for some gain, *niṣkāma karma* means literally following the *Vedic* rules without a desire for gain, and *bhakti* means devotion or love of God. Viśvanātha's ethical ladder also contains mixed stages, such as a state of devotion mixed with some desire for gain, devotion mixed with knowledge or scholasticism, and devotion confined to the realm of one's nature. It also defines subtle distinctions such as the superiority of knowledge over action. The Ramhal opens *Mesilat Yesharim's* by

declaring the importance of the *mitzvot* in the first chapter named "Of Man's Duty in the World":

> It is fundamentally necessary both for saintliness and for the perfect worship of God to realize clearly what constitutes man's duty in this world, and what goal is worthy of his endeavors throughout all the days of his life (Kaplan 1966, 22). We thus see that the chief function of man in this world is to keep the *Mitzvot*, to worship God, and to withstand trial. (Kaplan 1966, 34)

This is quite similar to the *Vedic* or *Dharmic* worldview that considers human life to be grounded in the performance of the various *Dharmic* duties, regarding which writes Viśvanātha:

> One should boldly perform one's duties, even though they may have some slight fault. This is better than performing other's duties even if those duties are executed well and are full of good qualities. (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 133)

Having emphasized the importance of performing one's duties, which serve as the foundation for both *Dharma* and *Halacha* worldviews, the lower stages of both ethical ladders may first be examined; for the Ramhal, this represents a state of observation and contemplation of one's bad habits and bad traits, let alone sins or crimes. In chapter 3 named "Concerning some phases of the trait of watchfulness" he writes:

> In short, a man should be so attentive to his actions, and so watchful of his conduct, that he will not tolerate in himself any bad habit or evil tendency, much less any actual sin or transgression. I consider it necessary for a man to conduct himself like a merchant who always takes stock of his affairs so that he may not go wrong in his reckoning. He should set aside a special time each day for the practice of self-scrutiny. For this practice, carried on not sporadically but regularly, is fraught with consequences of great import. (Kaplan 1966, 48)

For Viśvanātha, however, this lower stage represents a utilitarian state of performing one's duties, or a stage in which one performs these duties with some ulterior motivation in mind. He states that the *Vedic* injunctions are in the realm of *karma* (action) and *jñāna* (knowledge), and that their realm is worldly or material. This is indicated by describing them as confining to the realm of the three *guṇas* or qualities of material nature. He writes:

> The *Vedas* have the ability to reveal only *karma* and *jñāna* and other topics composed of the three modes (*traiguṇya-viṣaya*) for personal gratification. The suffix *ya* in *traiguṇya-viṣaya* here denotes self-interest. This statement of course means that the majority of texts deal with material subjects (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 75). This verse speaks of the persons with wavering intelligence, involved in

> *sakāma-karma*, who are very dull witted. They speak excellently pleasant words of the *Vedas* which are like a poisonous but attractive flowering plant. Since their consciousness has been deluded by those words, they are not endowed with fixed intelligence. (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 72)

This no doubt represents a strong critique of the *Vedic* injunctions which in their lower aspects are confined within the material nature and serve to fulfill human desires. The Ramhal looks into the higher state of Zeal in the pursuit of the *mitzvot*, while overcoming human nature; in the fourth chapter named "Of Zeal" he writes:

> To be zealous means to attend promptly to the performance of the *Mitzvot*, and to fulfill all their particulars. . . . Thus say our Sages, "Those who are Zealous perform a *Mitzvah* at the earliest possible opportunity."[19] In the same way that we must be ingenious and circumspect in order to escape the wiles of the *Yezer*,[20] and to prevent the power of evil from having dominion over us or from meddling with our affairs, so must we be ingenious and circumspect in order to avail ourselves of every possible opportunity to fulfill the *Mitzvot* and to prevent such opportunities from being lost (Kaplan 1966, 96). It should be borne in mind that it is the nature of man to be inert, and that the earthiness of the physical element in him acts as a weight upon him. Man, therefore, seeks to avoid all toil and effort. Accordingly, a man who desires the privilege of worshiping the Creator, blessed be He, must be able to prevail over his own nature, and act with strength and energy. (Kaplan 1966, 98)

Apparently the Ramhal considers human nature to be an obstacle in the pursuance of the *mitzvot*; the stage of zeal seems to represent a higher vision, a state where the practitioner gains a preliminary or vague sight of the creator, and as such becomes zealous and dexterous in the performance of the *mitzvot*, seeing the goal beyond them. Viśvanātha's ladder progresses further to the stage of disinterested action:

> There are two types of *yoga* explained in this section of the chapter; activities of *bhakti*, including hearing, chanting and other such activities; and prescribed duties offered to the Lord without personal desire (*niṣkāma-karma-yoga*), which is expressed later in the verse *karmaṇy evādhikāras te* (Bg 2.47). (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 67–68)

This stage of a disinterested performance of duty represents Viśvanātha's version of cleanliness, or of following one's duty without personal desires or ulterior motivations. Ramhal too ascends to the stage of cleanliness at this point of his ladder, and in the tenth chapter named "Cleanness," he writes:

> Once a man has so trained himself in being watchful of his conduct that he has taken the first step toward being free from flagrant sin, once he has acquired the habit of zealously performing his religious duties and has developed a love and longing for his Creator, he will, by force of such training, learn to keep aloof from all worldly strivings and fix his mind on spiritual perfection, until he is altogether clean. The fire of physical passion will die out in his heart, and a longing for the divine will awaken in him. Then will his vision become so clear and so pure that nothing will mislead him. He will be beyond the sinister power of his physical being, and his conduct will be free from all possible taint. (Kaplan 1966, 136–138)

Apparently for Ramhal cleanliness represents not only extinguishing desires, but also a state of purity and clarity that allows a preliminary vision of God. Viśvanātha offers an interesting observation that considers knowledge to be higher than action. He writes: "*Jñāna* and *karma* cannot be said to be *nistraiguṇya* because of the presence of *sattva* in *jñāna*, and *rajas* in *karma"* (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 67–68). The implication is that Viśvanātha aspires for a higher state of mind, beyond action knowledge, a state that is apparently transcendental. Ramhal describes saintliness to be grounded in separation in chapter 13 named "Abstinence" and writes:

> Abstinence is the beginning of saintliness. All that we have thus far set forth is what a man must do in order to be righteous; henceforth, we shall speak of what a man must do in order to be saintly. We shall find that abstinence bears the same relation to saintliness as watchfulness does to zeal. Abstinence and watchfulness constitute merely the shunning of evil; but saintliness and zeal constitute the doing of good. Our sages laid down the principle, "In order to be holy, it is necessary to abstain even from things that are permitted." The very term "abstinence" denotes keeping aloof from things. It therefore implies so restricting in the enjoyment of things permitted as to avoid even coming in contact with things that are forbidden. To practice abstinence means to keep away from anything which, though not in itself evil, might in time, even if not immediately, give rise to evil consequences. (Kaplan 1966, 236–238)

Separation is somewhat similar to the stage of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, which has already been mentioned, in that it represents both a stage of detachment and absent of desire for material things, and the foundation of devotion or love of God. Ramhal articulates a similar stage that he considers to be the stage of purity. In chapter 16 named "Purity," he writes:

> Purity consists in perfecting one's heart and one's thoughts. Thus David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalms, 51.12). A man is pure when he does not give the evil *Yezer* an opportunity to influence his conduct; when wisdom and reverence rather than sin and lust govern all his actions, including

> those that pertain to the welfare of the body. A man may lead an abstinent life, insofar as he takes from the world only what is indispensable. But he must, in addition, purify his heart and his thoughts by seeking to derive from the little that he does take from the world, not pleasure and satisfaction of desire, but some intellectual and spiritual good. This teaching is conveyed in the verse, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths" (Prov. 3.6). (Kaplan 1966, 270)

The Ramhal highlights separation or renunciation as necessary to develop closeness to the Divine Service. Viśvanātha looks on this somewhat differently and describes the state of *karma-jñāna-miśra-bhakti*, which refers to devotion mixed with work and knowledge:

> O Arjuna, because you cannot reject *karma*, *jñāna* and other processes in your present state, and are not qualified for the supreme *bhakti*, *kevala-bhakti*, and because you should not degrade yourself to perform the inferior *sakāma-bhakti*, you should perform *bhakti*, with a slight mixture of *karma* and *jñāna* (*karma-jñāna-miśra-pradhānī-bhūta-bhakti*) but which is *niṣkāma.* (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 325)

This is another way of examining separation or renunciation; from this point of view, attachment to action and knowledge serves as an obstacle for *bhakti* or devotion and, as such, objects related to both action and knowledge should be renounced, as to open a space, so to speak, for pure devotion. In a footnote, Bhānu Svāmi explains this state:

> This is predominantly *bhakti* with some mixture of other elements. It is similar to *karma-yoga* because activities are performed, but it is superior to *karma yoga* and *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* because all activities, even beyond prescribed duties, are offered to the Lord without desire. It is similar to *jñāna-miśra-bhakti* because the person has knowledge of *ātmā* and *paramātmā*. But it is superior to *jñāna-miśra-bhakti* because it has abundant appreciation of the personal features of the Lord. But because the consciousness is not always fixed on the Lord, the activities are offered after performance rather than before. Thus it cannot be classed as *ananya-bhakti.* (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 325–326)[21]

Bhānu Svāmi highlights the various states of devotion; some are mixed and some are pure and, of course, the pure stage is the highest. Viśvanātha now explains a state of devotion that is performed according to one's nature, and as such, still not supremely pure:

> Kṛṣṇa explains this in two verses. Whatever you do, whether following rules of the Vedas or whether performing worldly action, whatever you eat or drink in ordinary life, whatever austerities you perform, do it in such a way that it

> becomes an offering to me. One should call this neither *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* nor *bhakti-yoga*. The practitioners of *karma-yoga* offer actions prescribed in the scriptures to the Lord, but not all of the actions they do in ordinary life. The devotees, however, offer to the Lord all the actions of their mind, *prāṇas* and senses. The method of *bhakti* is stated: "In accordance with the particular nature one has acquired in conditioned life, whatever one does with body, words, mind, senses, intelligence or purified consciousness one should offer to the supreme, thinking, "This is for the pleasure of Lord Nārāyaṇa" (SB 11.2.36). (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 325–326)

Here Viśvanātha distinguishes *karma yoga* from *bhakti* or devotion, which is performed according to one's nature and disposition. The former relates to offering prescribed actions or *viddhis* to the Lord, whereas the latter relates to offering everything one does with body, words, mind, senses, intelligence, or consciousness to the supreme, thinking it to be for the pleasure of the Lord. Ramhal's ladder now leads to love of God, which he considers to be the stage of Saintliness. In the eighteenth chapter called "Saintliness,"[22] he writes:

> We see this occurring usually between friends, between husband and wife, and between father and son. In fact, all who are bound to each other by true love never say, "I have not been asked to do more," or, "It is enough that I do what I am expressly told." From the merest suggestion, they try to reason out the implied wish behind it, and then they do whatever they think will give the beloved one pleasure. The same is true of the man who loves his Creator faithfully, for such a man is, in a sense, a lover. The *Mitzvot* which are explicitly commanded are to him merely an indication of the purpose which is willed and desired by God, blessed be His name. Such a man will not say "It is enough that I do what I am expressly commanded," or, "I will fulfill only those duties which have been imposed upon me." On the contrary, he will say, "Now that I have discovered what God's purpose is, it will guide me in going beyond the prescribed commandment, and in cultivating those phases of the commandments which, so far as I may judge, are pleasing to Him." Accordingly, the principle of saintliness is that the scope of the observance of the *Mitzvot* should be enlarged. This applies to every possible aspect of the Mitzvot, and to the circumstances under which they are to be observed. (Kaplan 1966, 292–294)

Apparently this stage represents pure love of God, a stage in which one performs all of all the *mitzvot* just for the pleasure of the Creator and out of love for him. Viśvanātha Cakravartī concludes his ladder with Pure Bhakti or pure and unmixed devotion to God:

> Before the discussion of *niṣkāma-karma*, however, *bhakti* is discussed. Thus the statement *nistraiguṇyo bhava* to Arjuna (Bg 2.45) indicates that this section is about *bhakti*. . . . Because *bhakti* alone, and no other process, is beyond the

> three modes, a person transcends the modes only by performing *bhakti-yoga.* (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 67–68)

Viśvanātha emphasizes this point elsewhere where he states that *bhakti* is beyond material nature: "The *nirguṇa* nature of *bhakti* is also well supported by the statements of the Eleventh Canto of *Bhāgavatam*" (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 67). At last Viśvanātha describes *bhakti* as a state of complete absorption in the Supreme:

> Or the phrase *man-manā bhava* can mean: "Be situated with your mind completely absorbed in me, Śyāmasundara, with moon-like face, with shining locks of hair and beautiful eye brows, raining nectar in the form of glances of sweet mercy." And then *bhava mad-bhaktaḥ* can mean, "And give all your senses such as the ears to me. Adore me (*bhava mad-bhaktaḥ*) using all the senses with such services as hearing, chanting, seeing my *mūrti*, cleaning and anointing my temple, picking flowers, and offering me garlands, ornaments, umbrella and *cāmara* Of these four—thinking of me with the mind, serving me with the senses, worshipping me with items, and offering respects to me with the whole body—do all of them or any of them, and you will attain me (*mām eva eśyasi*). Make an offering of your mind, your senses, or items of worship unto me, I will respond and give myself to you." (Bhānu Svāmī 2003, 609)

This state represents the culmination of Viśvanāthas's ladder, and it represents pure devotion, untouched by attachment to action and knowledge, spontaneous and above any conditioning of one's nature. We have described the Ramhal's ladder up to the point of saintliness. From here his ladder continues as follows: "Saintliness leads to Humility; Humility leads to Fear of Sin; Fear of Sin leads to Holiness; Holiness leads to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit leads to the Revival of the Dead." However, we will leave it there and not develop this further, although no doubt much more could be said about both systems and their comparisons.

In summary, both Judaism and Hinduism have much in common, as far as ethics are concerned. Both traditions consider duty to be the foundation of ethics, and both adhere to similar principles as their foundation. The main difference seems to be their relations or lack of relations to the personal Supreme God; whereas the Hindu notion of *Dharma* seems to be generally grounded in the impersonal notion of *apauruṣeya*, the Jewish understanding of ethics is highly personal, and deeply related to the individual's and the community's direct relations with the Supreme.

NOTES

1. A literary genre depicting rules for everyday life including topics concerning food, marriage, and the duties of the various caste members.
2. Six orthodox schools: Mīmāṁsā, Vedānta, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika.
3. Yama: nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, sexual abstinence, non-accumulation. Niyama: purity, satisfaction, austerity, study of scriptures, surrender to the Supreme.
4. Quoting Lipner 1989, 2 and Zaehner 1966, 102–124.
5. Quoting *Bg* 3: 20–26, 35.
6. The *Bhagavad gītā*, for example, furthers nonviolence but at the same time furthers just war undertaken out of selfless duty.
7. Sacrificer, the patron of the sacrifice.
8. Fourth century BCE.
9. First century BCE.
10. Both seventh century CE.
11. Jaimini, *The Mīmāṁsā sūtra*, 1.1.1–2.
12. An unseen force.
13. Vaiṣṇavism is the largest Hindu denomination.
14. For a thorough discussion of his life period, see Burton 2000, 13–22; Clooney 2010; Guedalia 2017.
15. The "Hindu Bible," one of the *prasthāna trayī* or triple foundations of the *Vedānta* tradition dated about the fourth to the second century BCE.
16. A Talmudic text not incorporated in the *Mishnah*; dated about the second to the third century CE.
17. Such as Śaṅkara's *advaitin* commentary.
18. Avodah Zara 20b.
19. Quoting Pesachim 4a.
20. Desire, evil inclination.
21. See note 11.
22. The Hebrew term denoted by the Ramhal is "Hasidut" which could also be possibly translated as "Devotion."

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Chapter 5

Humane Subjects and Eating Animals

Comparing Implied Anthropologies in Jewish and Jain Dietary Practice

Aaron Gross

Jewish and Jain communities have generally arrived at different pragmatic decisions about eating food, but they agree that how we eat and the stories we tell about food matter to one's identity as Jewish or Jain. This is especially so around the question of animal food. Jains of all varieties tend to be vegetarian, and perhaps one of the only sweeping generalizations we can make about the diverse Jain community is that all Jain populations see vegetarianism normatively and as an admirable, usually socially expected, dietary practice. By contrast, Jews of all varieties tend to eat meat and some require special rules for the slaughter of food animals and the preparation of meat, but the normative nature of Jewish meat eating is not so homogenous as is Jain vegetarianism. Both in the United States and Israel, we have explicitly Jewish organizations that encourage the practice of vegetarianism on Jewish grounds—and polemics against them—whereas I am aware of no Jain societies promoting the consumption of meat on Jain grounds.[1]

Crucially for this chapter, for many contemporary Jews and Jains their practice of avoiding or eating meat is self-consciously a source of meaning and cultural identity. Moreover, Jain and Jewish scriptural sources provide evidence that this phenomenon of making meaning through eating or refusing to eat animals is a longstanding feature of the traditions. Both traditions are replete with rules and stories that surround the question of killing and eating an animal for food. In sum, animal food—particularly the question of eating animals—has a direct line to these traditions' understandings of what Christian theologian Paul Tillich called the "dimension of depth," to issues of "ultimate concern" (1959, 7–8).

This chapter will attempt to interpret some of the different ways that Jain vegetarianism and Jewish meat eating encode morally infused identities by exploring the anthropologies and ethics implied in different Jewish and Jain

dietary practices surrounding animal food. To do so, it will reflect on one important *structure*, a type of ideological machine, that plays a decisive role in animating Jewish and Jain practices surrounding animal food. It is this ideological mechanism that I argue enables these food practices to rise to a level of intensity that allows them to play a decisive role in forging identities. I will theorize this structure here as the "humane subject"—a way of defining the human present in both Judaisms and Jainisms that is in part defined by how it treats other forms of life, by how humane it is. The humane subject is, of course, a term of art for use by those looking to understand either a religious tradition (Judaism, Jainism, or others) or the phenomena of dietary practices from the outside, but it makes explicit a complex of moral sensibilities, effects, daily practices, and, ultimately, understandings of human nature, that in part make Jewish and Jain communities what they are. It is embodied philosophy—what Pierre Bourdieu has called "[e]nacted belief, instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton that 'leads the mind unconsciously along with it'" (1990, 68).

The humane subject is a form of life defined by two opposing trajectories that create a generative tension. In the first trajectory this structure defines the humane subject by the assumption of a binary opposition between *homo sapiens* and all (or nearly all) other terrestrial animal species that elevates the human and places it in an class by itself, ultimately, I will argue, rendering other forms of life "sacrificable." Following Jacques Derrida, I maintain that the elevation of "the human" and the legitimacy of "sacrifice" for the sake of the human are practically a single gesture. Now that humans have been marked as distinct and other life as sacrificable, a second trajectory constrains the space of sacrificial violence opened by the first movement. Both movements together, I argue, are visible in each distinct Jewish and Jain response to the question of eating animals and function to mark out distinct types of ethically infused human subjectivity—distinctly Jewish or Jain forms of the humane subjects. To clarify, I am not arguing that Judaism or Jainism as whole traditions contain sacrificial streams and anti-sacrificial streams, though one could productively analyze these traditions in this way; I am arguing that *any particular* Jewish or Jain embodied practice surrounding eating animals reflects this tension and resolves it in its own way. Judaism and Jainism, depending on where you look, contain many different articulations of the structure I am calling the humane subject.

Attending to the structure of the humane subject will make visible important family resemblances between the Jewish and Jain engagement with the question of eating animals: a shared assumption of human supremacy, a shared analysis that living in civilization requires harm to other forms of life, and a shared conclusion that the best humans can do is limit that violence by either refusing to eat animals or by restricting eating animals. Attending to

the structure of the humane subject will also help us better read the mythological logic behind the different conclusion members of these two traditions tend to reach regarding the acceptability of eating animals in the contemporary world. The humane subject will highlight the explanatory inadequacy of explanations like "Jains are vegetarian because we practice ahimsa" or "Jews eat meat because the Torah gives us permission to do so in Genesis 9," provide a more adequate basis for future comparison of religious dietary practices, and help clarify the nature of dietary practice more generally.

Before I proceed to a fuller explanation of the humane subject and the particular form it takes in Jewish and Jain cases, it is worth noting that the immense importance of food generally and meat in particular, once ignored by academics, is now a well-established premise of food studies.[2] I am not saying something new when I note that how one eats or refuses to eat animals in both the Jewish and Jain cases is a religious practice that imbeds an anthropology in daily life. As Gillian Feely-Harnik has shown in her study of early Judaisms and Christianities, food provides "a powerfully concentrated 'language' for debating moral-legal issues and transforming social relations" (1981, 1).[3] In another study, Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus argues that dietary practices related to the consumption of meat in the rabbinic context encode a system that elevates "rational, imaginative humans over brute animals, men over women, Torah scholars over those unschooled in Torah, and ethnic/kinship ties over ties based on shared faith or shared charismatic experiences" (2004, 310). Speaking of food in the Hindu context in terms that would equally apply to the Jain, R. S. Khare describes food as "a moral (i.e., dharma-ordained) substance, a semiotic field, and a comprehensive 'discourse' (in Paul Ricoeur's sense). Thus if food expresses the cosmic truth, showing its ultimate control by the dharma-based principles of cosmic creation and maintenance, it also expresses itself with intricate social-ritual (and karma-dharma) distinctions, classifications, and customary actions, releasing discourses on meaningful action concerning how food, body, and self-need to be handled in each other's terms to achieve the . . . goal of liberation" (1992, 6). That is, the Hindu's relationship with food, body, and self are co-interpreted, and the Hindu cannot act in relation to food without also "saying something" about body and self. Food forges identity, and, we should add, it does so all the more powerfully for the fact that everyone must eat. Some religious practitioners may be actively and self-consciously trying to manipulate food for ideological or pragmatic ends, but, even for an unlearned person—even for a small child—food practices are present each day, working their influence silently.

At this point I should clarify a potential complication: analyzing the religious logic of Jain vegetarianism and Jewish meat-eating utilizing the humane subject takes us to some of the most fundamental pillars of these

traditions and often these pillars are the shared providence of, respectively, all Dharma or Abrahamic traditions. In the Jain case, vegetarianism as such could be sufficient to mark a distinctly Jain identity when living amongst populations that include large numbers of meat eaters. However, when Jains are amongst other vegetarian populations such as some Hindu communities, the particular details of Jain vegetarian practice, for example the avoidance of garlic and onions or drinking only boiling water, may become more crucial markers of identity. In the Jewish case, since practically all Jews live amongst meat-eating populations, the distinctly Jewish part of their meat eating has to do with the particular ways traditional Jews eat meat, for example avoiding pork and restricting themselves to animals killed by the method known as *shechita*. Thus in the Jain case, say a Jain living in Boston or London, merely being a vegetarian may make up a part of his or her Jain identity because of how it puts the person at odds with his or her environment; the same, we could add, is true of the minority of Jews who tie their Jewish identities to vegetarianism. However, when vegetarianism is the norm, it may be less tied to a specifically Jain identification than an identification with Dharma teachings and practices that are understood as the shared inheritance of multiple forms of Dharma including Hinduisms and Buddhisms. Similarly, in the Jewish case, since meat eating is the norm in all the major Jewish population centers, generic meat eating may be less tied to a specifically Jewish identity than an identification with Abrahamic teaching and practices that are understood as the shared inheritance of multiple forms of religion including Christianities and Islams.

Thus, when we speak about vegetarianism and its ties to contemporary Jain identity or meat eating and its ties to contemporary Jewish identity, we are speaking rather crudely about a complex set of phenomena. Depending on the population we select, Jain vegetarianism and Jewish meat eating may not be understood as *uniquely* Jain or Jewish. That is, without undertaking massive ethnographic work, if we contrast contemporary Jain practices of vegetarianism and Jewish practices of meat eating, we may be contrasting these two distinct *religious populations or traditions* or we may be contrasting two distinct *religious ideational complexes*, the complex of Dharma traditions and the complex of Abrahamic traditions. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on comparing Jain and Jewish cases and the perhaps undecidable question about whether the true comparison cuts deeper to the level of entire religious complexes will be left unresolved.

For clarity, I will continue with a more detailed description of the construct of the "humane subject" and then move to some brief considerations of Jewish and Jain exempla that will flesh out the theoretical points I wish to make. The emphasis on theory over description in this chapter will leave readers seeking a thicker discussion of the minutia of Jewish and Jain dietary

practices unrewarded, but will prove a more direct road into understanding the power and ongoing relevance of a central artery of meaning making through food in these traditions. However, the approach of this chapter should be particularly rewarding to the reader who wishes to use the Jewish and Jain case to better understand the question of eating animals in its religious register. I have provided a more ethnographically rich account of the Jewish case elsewhere and hope to expand my ethnographic discussion of the Jain exempla discussed here in a future publication.[4]

JACQUES DERRIDA AND THE QUESTION OF SACRIFICE

The basic structure of the humane subject—in which human supremacy and the resultant sacrificibility of other forms of life vies with an anti-sacrificial countermovement—first became visible to me when trying to classify and organize Jewish responses to an animal abuse scandal in the AgriProcessors slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa, but was crystalized by my reading of Jacques Derrida's reflections on sacrifice. In both "'Eating Well' or the Calculation the Subject" and "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone," Derrida offers an interpretation of the authorized killing and eating of animals in the Abrahamic context that he names "sacrifice" and that he argues is fundamental to "religion." What does he mean by this?

In Derrida's reticent imagination of it, "religion," and really Derrida means Abrahamic religion, involves a movement that challenges, even defies, the vulnerability that he argues is characteristic of human life and indeed all forms of life. Abrahamic religion insists, as Derrida reads it, on a holy presence that must be kept safe and sound, that must be purified of all vulnerability. Derrida focuses our attention on the Abrahamic idea that the human, barring exceptional circumstances, is inviolable—an idea that is of course widely found in secular thought as well. He argues that the principle of restraint that flows from this assertion of human inviolability opens a space of violence; a quest for inviolability is what authorizes sacred violence. The two are linked in what he calls an "originary duplicity" (2002, 88). Thus Derrida theorizes a double movement of what he terms "life and sacrifice" (2002, 88). Natural life becomes sacrificable because some life, human life, is worth more than itself. "The humble respect for that which is sacrosanct (*heilig,* holy)," Derrida writes "*both requires and excludes* sacrifice" (2002, 88). In a world where some kind of violence is unavoidable, to insist on a practice of total nonviolence to the human specifically is, whether it is stated or not, to insist upon a justified or more justified violence against whatever is

deemed nonhuman. Derrida calls this the "*Violence* of sacrifice in the name of nonviolence" (2002, 88).[5]

What Derrida offers us here is a way to understand the internal logic through which an insistence on creating an impossible state in which the human is made inviolable authorizes human supremacy—a space for a justified violence to the nonhuman, a sacrifice—in service of human inviolability. If there is something to be kept safe above all, Derrida insists, sacrifice is inevitable: the only question is who. "I am trying especially to underscore," Derrida writes, "the *sacrificial* structure of the discourses to which I am referring . . . it is a matter of discerning a place left open, in the very structure of these discourses (which are also 'cultures') for a noncriminal putting to death. Such are the executions of ingestion, in*corp*oration, or introjections of the corpse. An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is 'animal'" (Derrida 1995, 278).[6]

Especially importantly for our purposes, Derrida also observes that the sacrificial structure, he argues is dominant in Abrahmic articulations of the subject, is assailed by counter-traditions. Derrida speaks about the possibility to "sacrifice sacrifice" (1995, 279) and ultimately hypothesizes the existence of an ancient counter-tradition that has, he argues, always accompanied the dominant sacrificial tradition in Abrahamic cultures (2008, 27–28). That is, while the elevation of the human, especially the male human (as a special partner to God in messianic transformation, as uniquely possessing an immortal soul, as uniquely capable of spiritual achievement, etc.), and a concomitant sacrificibility of the non- or less-human world is dominant, there are also traditions that deemphasize the uniqueness of the (male) human, emphasize "compassion" (2008, 27–28) for all life, and thus tolerate or simply accept that the human (male) can be violated for the sake of life. These traditions "sacrifice" the practice of making of the non- or less-human world in some respects sacrificable—they "sacrifice sacrifice." Significantly, Derrida places himself within this imagined counter-tradition of hope for a subject that no longer requires as its shadow a sacrificial subject.[7]

The argument of this chapter is that together a sacrificial structure and a counter, anti-sacrificial structure akin to what Derrida has named "sacrifice" and the "sacrifice of sacrifice" work *together* to define an ideal subject—an ethical subject, a humane subject—in contemporary dietary practice in a variety of Jewish and Jain contexts (and surely beyond).

JEWISH ARTICULATIONS OF THE HUMANE SUBJECT

Consider a specific exemplum from contemporary American Orthodox Jewish discourses around animal food. For reasons that I hope will soon

become clear, the current Orthodox leadership that controls the certification of kosher foods is generally suspicious of or hostile to the practice of vegetarianism; this is a fact in need of explanation. I argue that the way in which animal food constitutes (symbolically and actually) the human subject in these communities is bound up with actual animals being consumed. Vegetarianism, perhaps surprisingly, becomes perceived as a threat to deeply held ideas about the human that are propagated through a religiously regulated consumption of animals.

Consider a 2001 polemical, anti-vegetarian essay entitled "Vegetarianism and Judaism" by the highly regarded contemporary halachicist (Jewish legal expert) J. D. Bleich. My interpretation will utilize the rubric of the humane subject; that is, it will attend to Bleich's articulation of a space in which humans are radically distinct from animals in such a way that animals become sacrificable and counter-trends to this sacrificial structure. Rabbi Bleich argues that there are three views of vegetarianism that have been articulated by "rabbinic scholars" (2001, 372). For the sake of time, I will restrict myself to the second view. Bleich traces this second view to R. Isaac Abarbanel and R. Joseph Albo—two giants of medieval Sephardic Judaism. Under this view, argues Bleich, actual vegetarian practice is viewed positively, but—and here is why this example is so telling—only if it is practiced in order to *further elevate the human*. Indeed, Bleich points out:

> R. Joseph Albo maintains that renunciation of the consumption of meat for reasons of concern for animal welfare is not only morally erroneous but even repugnant. Albo asserts that this was the intellectual error committed by Cain and that it was this error that was the root cause of Cain's act of fratricide. Scripture reports that Cain brought a sacrifice of the produce of the land while Abel offered a sacrifice from the animals of his flock. Albo opines that Cain did not offer an animal sacrifice because he regarded men and animals as equals, and, accordingly, felt that he had no right to take the life of an animal, even as an act of divine worship. (2001, 373–374)

Here we see the suggestion that the gravest of moral consequences—the murder of the inviolable human—might result from a refusal or disinclination to sacrifice animals. The anxiety about vegetarianism—which threatens to be an anti-sacrificial gesture, a sacrifice of sacrifice—we see expressed here, I argue, is a logical consequence of the construct I have called the humane subject. As Albo fears that Cain did not offer sacrifice because he regarded "men and animals as equals," Bleich seems to fear that contemporary Jewish vegetarians similarly are failing to distinguish between humans and animals. For Bleich, a certain kind of Jewish pro-vegetarianism, the contemporary fact of which is the sociological context of him publishing the essay (which

is found in an anthology on Judaism and environmentalism), constitutes *too strong* of an anti-sacrificial gesture to be normatively Jewish. For Bleich, vegetarianism can only count as Jewish if, following the model he finds in Abarbanel and Albo, its potential anti-sacrificial implications are neutralized by explicitly disavowing any meaningful form of human-animal equality.

Thinking about Bleich's position through the lens of the humane subject can help render this at first potentially puzzling assertion that vegetarianism would lead to murder less strange. As we see how meat eating is the direct efflux of human inviolability ("sacrifice") and how a move that would deny the legitimacy of meat eating ("anti-sacrifice" or the "sacrifice of sacrifice") would tend toward reducing the difference between human and animal, the possible threat posed by vegetarian practice becomes intelligible. In the symbolic logic that Bleich (like Derrida) finds in a wide range of Jewish sources, requiring vegetarianism would symbolically render the human more violable. Bleich's interpretation of the Judaic understanding of the human subject, especially the male subject, mitigates toward eating animals as a vehicle for asserting the absolute value of the human as ordained by God.

The logic of the humane subject also explains why this threat of vegetarianism is neutralized if, as Bleich argues is the requirement to legitimately practice vegetarianism in the Jewish context, the diet is adopted for the sake of elevating the human, for example as an exercise in discipline. Such a move would ensure that even a vegetarian diet could, symbolically if not actually, continue to sacrifice a kind of animal—say the animal aspects of the human—for the sake of a fuller humanity (achieved through a disciplining of animal passions).

Elsewhere, I have shown that a wide range of Jewish texts—Biblical, Talmudic, Medieval, and contemporary—are marked by a similar tension between sacrificial and anti-sacrificial stances as I have defined them here.[8] The most prominent example is the long-observed and unexpected tension between vegetarianism and meat eating articulated by the P source in the first and ninth chapter of Genesis where the very destiny of humanity is at stake. Widely discussed in biblical studies but often unknown to contemporary Jews and Christians, Jewish and Christian interpretation of Genesis has practically unanimously maintained that God ordained vegetarianism in Genesis 1:29–30 immediately after the verse that, ironically, is often popularly considered a justification for humans to eat meat: God's giving humans dominion over some animals in verse 1:28. Actual permission to eat meat, according to these traditional Jewish and Christian readings, doesn't occur until after humanity has become corrupt and Noah leaves the ark to begin the process of repopulating the earth in Genesis 9. That is, thinking about Jewish authors and texts that discuss eating animals as presenting *competing visions of a humane subject* is a fruitful way to get at one of the most important and

interesting features of the way Jews make meaning through eating (or not eating) animals.

Turning all too quickly to Jain traditions, we again find the structure of the humane subject illuminating. In Jainism, too, there are similar structures of human supremacy authorizing violence to the nonhuman for the sake of the human and then setting an *appropriate limit* on this violence (for example, it is generally considered appropriate that a Jain lay person may domesticate animals and forcibly take their milk or use them for labor, but eating meat is seen as going too far in allowing the nonhuman to be sacrificed). As we have seen in the example of Bleich and the authorities he cites, understanding *what limits on human violence to the nonhuman are appropriate* is a, or perhaps the, decisive issue. Cain, by thinking that human superiority did not extend to the point that killing animals for food is appropriate, becomes an archetype of error. Abel, by knowing that human superiority *does* extend to the point of allowing animals to be literally consumed, is the archetype Jews are invited to emulate. This does not imply that Abel thinks he can use animals in any way he chooses; restraint remains. Bleich too admits of a kind of anti-sacrificial gesture in accepting that humans must kill animals within the highly restrictive confines of Jewish law, which to this day limits the kinds of animals that can be eaten, when they can be eaten, and how they must be killed and processed. To anticipate the crux of this comparison, I argue that that the first, sacrificial gesture is a point of relative commonality between the two traditions and that the manifest difference between them—the contemporary fact that most Jains remain vegetarian and most Jews eat meat—can be best explained not by understanding Jainism as simply "anti-sacrificial" (as it is often described) but in the relative strength of the Jain anti-sacrificial gesture. Both traditions are sacrificial in a similar way because of the radical uniqueness they assign to human life but, I argue, Jainism simply has a stronger countervailing tradition of sacrificing sacrifice and de-emphasizing human inviolability.

JAIN TRADITIONS AS STRONGLY ANTI-SACRIFICIAL

Despite its well-known regard for all life, Jain traditions are not essentially different from Abrahamic traditions in placing the human in a category all by itself and thus rendering animal life, to an extent, "sacrificable." Perhaps the most lucid way we see a preeminence familiar to the Abrahamic traditions also assigned to the human in Jain traditions is the assertion that only in human form, or sometimes only in the male human form, can a *jiva* (a living being) achieve *moksha* (liberation) and the accompanying notion that for a

human to be reborn as an animal is undesirable (contrast this with traditions that might venerate the ability to move between human and animal form).

In field work I conducted among Jain communities in New Delhi, Jaipur, and Ahmadabad in visits first extending from late 1996 to early 1997 and again in 2009 that I am in the process of preparing for publication, I frequently encountered the notion that one way to be reborn as an animal—or at least transmigrate in their direction—is to eat them. I have no reason to think this has changed recently. This danger of eating animals was only occasionally formally put forward by Jain ascetic leaders in their sermons to laity as a reason to be vigilant in dietary practice, but it was always there in the background. If this possibility of becoming an animal by eating an animal is inquired after, as I sometimes did in interviews, it was invariable affirmed as accurate. The superiority of the human birth is so obvious that it normally does not need to be stated.

In interviews I found that practically every Jain acetic or lay leader with whom I spoke understood human life as radically unique. Indeed, some Jains were almost eager to show that despite the famous Jain concern for animal life, Jains too saw human life as something different (although the latter is likely at least in part a response to my presence as an American and non-Jain). And while the situation for the Jain renunciate is more complicated, it is readily acknowledged among Jains that some animals, particular small ones like insects, will inevitably be killed in the course of the ordinary life of Jains and this is, in the end, perceived as just the way of the world even if it is also perceived as unfortunate. For human life as we know it to go on, animals must die and while Jainism may theoretically be advising all its members to become ascetics, it also proceeds to give them a lay path, a path in this violent world. As John Cort has emphasized, Jainism is more than a *moksha marg*, a path to salvation; it is also a path of compromise, of reducing violence while knowing one has chosen a life that necessitates violence (2001). Such violence is a limitation of living in *samsara* and, short of a fully committed ascetic life, cannot be avoided.

James Laidlaw beautifully captures this when he interprets the central Jain religious value of *ahimsa* (nonharm or nonviolence) as an "aesthetic sensibility" rather than an absolute taboo prohibiting all violence. To illustrate this dimension of *ahimsa*, Laidlaw describes an incident when a group of Jain interlocutors he was with found themselves riveted to the TV watching a documentary on fish farming. They had not chosen to watch the documentary, but the TV was playing in the background and the documentary caught their attention. Laidlaw explains that the film did not depict any suffering fish or even fish being killed "although the reason they were being farmed was I suppose easy enough to deduce." Laidlaw continues:

> My friend's mother was riveted to the screen, in horrified fascination. She made us all watch, and the younger women joined her in her mounting distress. They kept up a litany of exclamations, "Oh! Look, look . . . Look!" . . . At the climax of her distress, the litany became a magical incantation as she took to repeating, "Oh Bhagwan! Oh Bhagwan!," and finally, "Oh Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram." Now I am sure that it was not any anticipated events, such as the death or consumption of fish, that caused this reaction. What was on the screen in front of us was, in itself, horrifying. . . . It was *samsara* [the difficult cycle of rebirth that all unenlightened beings are subject to]. (1995, 159–160)

Laidlaw's point is that sometimes *ahimsa* is about more than simply the avoidance of harm (an ethical aim); ahimsa has aesthetic dimensions interwoven with its ethical concerns and, in much of daily life, it is ahimsa as an aesthetic sensibility rather than as an ethical demand that prevails.

My point in bringing Laidlaw's exempla to the table is to say that Jainism does not shrink from acknowledging the normality of violence, and has multiple strategies for responding to violence other than direct (anti-sacrificial) prohibition. Indeed, elsewhere Laidlaw points out that "One of the oldest texts of the Jain canon explains in detail why even plants [usually exemplars of nonviolence], as they derive sustenance from the ground, thereby destroy other creatures living in the soil" (Laidlaw 2005, 182). And in a world where a human rebirth is valued more highly than any other and where violence is the way of the world, it seems clear enough that there will be times when human life must be preserved at the expense of other life (if plants must do this, humans all the more). Even though the Jains in Laidlaw's story don't eat fish, the death of so many fish at human hands was not a moral outrage to them the way, say, human genocide and torture would be. There are degrees of sacrificability. Indeed, the whole premise of why a given Jain might renounce and become a Jain monk or nun (statistically an extremely rare act) is that renouncing puts one in a situation where sacrifice is either not needed at all or needed less. Jain commitment to a lay and not only acetic community—which is to say Jainism as a longstanding social phenomenon—is an acceptance of living under conditions where violence is inevitable.

Perhaps no story more lucidly articulates the Jain view that, for the lay person, sacrifice is at times inevitable than a rare Jain story where a Jain monk advises in favor of *hiṁsā* (violence), the tale of Sudatta, which P. Jaini describes as "well-known" and "often represented in art" (1979, 281). The story is set in Karnataka where Jain mendicants have historically wielded considerable influence. The monk Sudatta was meeting with a local tribal leader named "Sala" when they are faced with an enraged tiger who threatens to kill the whole party. Without hesitation, Sudatta gives his staff (one of the only possessions allotted to a Jain monk) to Sala and shouts "poy [smite him],

Sala!" The tribal leader was so impressed that he founded a Jain kingdom called "Poysala." This is not a typical Jain story; more representative would be a whole range of tales in which Jain spiritual adepts are able to magically calm or endure enraged beasts. Yet, Jaini comments, "whether or not the tale of Suddata has any basis in fact, the theme of doctrinally improper monkish involvement in the political fortunes of the nation certainly rings true" (1979, 282). I read Jaini's response as an admission that many but not all Jains will make that even renunciates must be (or in any case are) involved in violence. Tellingly, in this example, it is not a food animal that is killed. The story instead focuses on an "us or them" scenario. It suggests that when there is a direct threat to human life, then even a great practitioner of nonviolence, like Suddata, will recognize the necessity of a sacrifice. Indeed, the final end of the tale tells us, such an act of violence is dynasty founding: it is witnessing this permission to kill an animal for the sake of a human that inspires Sala to found a Jain kingdom.

Thus, while there are infinite differences between Jewish and Jain traditions in regards to the details of how they articulate human supremacy—differences that matter—I think we can also see large parts of both traditions as riffing on a single theme that I have called, following Derrida, "sacrifice": namely, an assertion of human inviolability, arguably a basic premise of civilization, that creates a space for authorized violence (however undesirable) to the nonhuman animal. Where I think we can see a truly dramatic difference between Jewish and Jain traditions is not in the absence of the sacrificial structure among Jains, but in the intensity with which the counter anti-sacrificial gesture is held up as an ideal in Jain traditions.

Please forgive the generalities necessitated by space limitations, but, as a rule, in Orthodox or liberal Jewish contexts in the United States, meat eating is not viewed as an ethical problem. Indeed, to make it a problem, as some Jewish vegetarians have, is an almost certain way to marginalize oneself. There are vocal Jewish vegetarians and their practice may be more or less respected as a legitimate expression of Judaism or of reasonable ethical concerns, but the presences of these minority voices only clarifies the dominant acceptance of meat. Whatever limitations there might be on the sacrifice of the nonhuman, dominant Jewish practice silently says that these limitations need not prevent the authorized killing and eating of other animals. The space of violence opened by sacrifice may be monitored—regulated through laws pertaining to the kinds of animals that may be killed, the methods of killing, and the degree of suffering that the animal will endure[9]—but not fundamentally eliminated. As J. D. Bleich points out in the same article I cited earlier, the position of the near-vegetarian, first Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, Abraham Isaac Kook, was that to attempt to eliminate such sacrifice by requiring vegetarianism would be to inappropriately rush the messianic age. Kook, who

was exceptional in his general friendliness to vegetarianism, Bleich correctly notes, was opposed to insisting upon a vegetarian diet and argued, like Albo before him, that such an insistence could lead to cannibalism. The sacrificial structure is to be constrained by countervailing gestures, but, in the logic that governs the dominant Jewish imaginations about which I am speaking, never obliterated. To obliterate sacrifice, this logic suggests at its extreme, would be to assault human ascendency and invite cannibalism.

Jain vegetarianism, by contrast, was considered by all the Jains in my fieldwork as the most minimal of anti-sacrificial gestures and the background upon which a variety of other intensifications of the anti-sacrificial gesture may be deployed. In the logic I have seen operative in Jain discussions of diet, the ideal is not vegetarianism but as radical a restriction of eating as possible. Fasts (*upvas*) are extremely desirable; Laidlaw describes them as "the most important ascetic penance" (Laidlaw 2005, 185). While the extent of actual fasting varies dramatically by household and individual, various methods of fasting are among the handful of practices with which almost all Jains would be familiar (Cort 2001, 134). And the well-known practice of *Sallekhana* or *Samadhi-maran*, a highly regulated fast until death that removes one fully from the cycle of eating, is the ultimate dietary practice. Performing such a fast is a highly public phenomena and those who do so successfully are often remembered as religious exemplars (Laidlaw 2005, 179). Thus, in my fieldwork I was constantly being pointed toward pious mothers who had adopted highly restrictive multi-year fasts or told of ascetics who were alleged to live for up to six months on sunshine and water alone as exemplars of the kind of person the Jain diet is meant to shape.

CONCLUSION

Looking at these two traditions with an eye toward the structure of the humane subject, we can see them as united in recognizing that the daily life of a typical householder means there will be some degree of violence (sacrifice) as a condition for achieving a certain quality of life for humans. Simultaneously we see both traditions trying to limit this violence (anti-sacrifice), for example, Jewish restrictions on the kinds of animals that can be eaten and the degree of suffering they may endure, or, in the Jain case, vegetarianism supplemented with other eating restrictions.

While dominant Jewish discourses today express relative contentment with the sacrificial worldview insofar as it is expressed through eating animals, the same cannot be said of the sentiments one finds in Jain dietary practices and the stories that are wound together with them. For Jains, if one is for now bound to live in a world where human inviolability demands a

certain degree of sacrifice, there is still a desire or hope for a world beyond sacrifice—a desire embodied in their relationship to animal food. (There are most definitely elements of the Jewish tradition that express a similar hope, but they do not currently control the dominant discourses of Judaism.) Since Jains concluded that eating necessitates some kind of sacrifice, the ideal diet is no diet at all: thus, the reverence for the fast. Where Jain vegetarianism and the extensive nature of Jain fasts can also be understood as a basic practice of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) or as a rejection of the brahmanical sacrificial system in favor of the "inner" sacrifice of *tapas* (asceticism) (Jaini 2000), the humane subject helps us understand these practices as a response to the sacrificial element already *within* Jain traditions and as a practice that does not simply discipline an already-formed subject, but that defines the very space of humanity against the backdrop of animality.

Thus, for both Jains and Jews the preciousness of human life or a human rebirth constitutes a problem of sorts in that sacrifice, as per Derrida's argument, always follows this elevation of the human. Jains and Jews and perhaps Abrahamic and Dharma traditions in general are, in the sense I have used the term here, equally sacrificial. Thus, what at first might appear as radically opposed dietary regimes, in fact, while certainly distinct, have a perhaps unanticipated degree of commonality. Both diets are ways of encoding in food a striving for a lesser violence where nonviolence is impossible. The difference between them is not that one is sacrificial and the other anti-sacrificial; rather, the difference is a matter of emphasis on the acuteness with which the problem of sacrifice—the opening of a space for authorized violence—is perceived and the strength of the associated anti-sacrificial gestures. Further, in both traditions, how animals are eaten comes to be associated with the question of sacrifice and becomes a site where the meaning of being a human is negotiated. The two traditions differ, we could say, in how they conclude these negotiations.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of pro-vegetarian positions in the Reform movement, America's largest Jewish denomination, see Gross (2004).

2. For discussion, see Belasco (2008).

3. A fuller quotation: "food, articulated in feeding, eating, starving, and fasting, provided a powerfully concentrated 'language' for debating moral-legal issues and transforming social relations. . . . Across major differences . . . the biblical writers emphatically insist on the mutuality of eating-speaking and remembering, a profoundly historical view most explicitly stated in God's command to the Israelites to tell their children about the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:26-27) and in Jesus's

command to 'Eat . . . Drink . . . Do this in remembrance of me'" (Feely-Harnik 1981, 1).

4. I have recently completed a book-length analysis of contemporary American Jewish meat eating, more specifically responses to controversies at what was at the time the nation's largest glatt kosher slaughterhouse, and its explication in terms of the humane subject (2014). I am in the process of preparing for publication thirty years of ethnographic study begun in 1996 of the dietary practices of several Indian Jain communities in New Delhi, Jaipur, and Ahmadabad, among both *Digambar* and *Svetambar* and both temple-going and aniconic Jains. The present chapter is in part meant to orient how these two parts of my own scholarship can be put in dialog and in so doing lay the theoretical groundwork for more detailed comparative work in religious studies, animal studies, and food studies.

5. Emphasis in original.

6. Emphasis in original. Derrida ultimately argues that the sacrificial structure he finds in Western meat eating generally is linked to the creation of what he has theorized, extensively and in manner I will not attempt to summarize here, as the "phallogocentric" structure of the subject. Indeed he argues that carnivory must be placed at the "center" of the subject. "I would still try to link the question of the 'who,'" the question of what it means to be a subject at all, "to the question of 'sacrifice.' It would be a matter not only of recalling the concept of the subject as phallogocentric structure, at least according to its dominant *schema*: one day I hope to demonstrate that this *schema* implies carnivorous virility. I would want to explain *carno-phallogocentrism*" (1995, 280).

7. For a more complete discussion of counter-traditions, see Crane and Gross (2015).

8. For discussion of these exempla, see Gross (2014, chapter 6).

9. For discussion see, Milgrom (1991).

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Chapter 6

Animal Justice and Moral Mendacity[1]

Purushottama Bilimoria

A. SETTING THE SCENE

There is always the risk of romanticizing when it comes to tackling the topic of animals, in classical discourses to contemporary practices. I wish to take up some of the sentiments we have toward animals and put them to test in respect of the claims to moral high grounds in Indian thought-traditions vis-à-vis Judaism as an early representative tradition within Abrahamic theologies. And I do this by turning the focus in this instance to the question of animals—on a par with issues of caste, gender, minority status, albeit still within the human community ambience. Which leads me to ask: How sophisticated and in-depth are the appreciation of the issues and questions that are currently being debated in contemporary circles? What degree of awareness could we say has been present in the traditions, not just in some perfunctory, platitudinal, belief-based descriptions or prescriptions, but in actual explanatory and morally sensitized senses?

There are numerous tropes to consider where animals are depicted and represented, or misrepresented. These may pertain to human sacrifice of animals, symbolic imagery in high-order astral practices. Consider, for example, animal mythic and hybrid iconography in ancient mythologies, art, and religions; the animal depicted as the denizen of monstrous evil, as threatening part of "brutish nature," living out the law of the jungle and, hence, requiring to be subdued under the law of the survival of the fittest. Then there is the utilitarian deployment of animals in agro-culture; in farming—the importance of the cow, buffalo, oxen, horse, and other hoofed animals; in dietary praxis and food consumption (meat industry, factory farming); in game hunting, circus entertainment and zoos, domestication (pet culture), animal guidance (e.g., for the blind and aged), veterinarian euthanasia,

bestiality, sexualization of animals, animals in human pornography; and other unrecorded implicates of animals in the human life-world or phantasias. Animals have become indispensable in scientific thinking also. Consider how animals provided clues for the supposed missing links in the evolutionary chain of being, with Spencer and Darwin (nonexistent prelapsarian animals were reconfigured to fill in certain gaps in neo-Darwinian theories). Today, Dawkins and Dennett clinch organism-evolution as the sideshow in the primordial soup of the Big Bang. Huge dinosaurs, mammoths, and other "monsters" are reconstructed or virtually resurrected from fossils and archeological excavations, with a certain degree of imaginative extrapolation (which we see projected on the big screen in movie houses and videos, such as "Jaws," "Armageddon," "Jurassic Park," etc.). Much in biology begins with observations of animal behavior and vivisections, and moves to implants of monitoring devices in bodies of animals, followed by animal testing of tissue cells, toiletries, and drugs that are supposed to save human lives, ending somewhere close to genetic manipulations and more sophisticated animal experimentation in biomedical laboratories and in psycho-linguistic research units. Mention may also be made of animals sent out to space or deployed in astronautical travels (e.g., as with chimps and dogs in unmanned rockets), and so forth. These interventionist instances mark the more recent inclusion of animals in the human theatrical, theoretical and far-reaching geographies (Bleich 1986, 84–89).

We just don't pause to realize the extent to which the ontology of the non-human animal species is pervasively sketched in the human *lebenswelt* (life-world). What would the human world have been without animals? This should give pause for us to wonder. We've done away with the gods in our modern world and replaced them with smartphones, so that we may hear distant voices even of those we may not have had any prior contact with. We are on the brink of doing away with vegetation; and a disastrously similar fate might await the animal kingdom also, according to some pessimist pundits. (As an aside, I was so very shocked not to see animals in any comparable numbers in Beijing or Shanghai—though a few people have begun to keep small puppies as pets; but there was no dearth of animal flesh, even live options in the fish tank as one enters street-side restaurants and diners for breakfast.)

Consider also the quantum of violence visited upon the biospheres and animal species. If only we were to record the pain, belching, shock, horror, anxiety, panic, confusion, and other emotions animals are capable of feeling and expression, fatally at the work of the "peaceful quick sniper or blade," then silence, in plant life and definitely in the animal factories and "live eating" restaurants in parts of the globe. Billions of animals undergo such a fate each year from discreet slaughterhouses to roadside butchers. The sheer

sacrifice that animals are subjected to for the palates of human beings—the imperative of hunger aside, which would not be the only motivation or incentive. If the recording of the collective and cumulative pain-states that animals undergo at the hands of human desires were to be played out loud into the open cosmos, my hunch is that the Hindu gods might be awakened from their sublime slumber while recognizing that "*ṛta*," the timeless order, divined by the law of karma, has been horribly disturbed: the divine order has been compromised. Why isn't there any such celestial intervention or redress here? Once we have the "measure" what do we do, here on earth? More *theory*, I suppose! (cf. Moore 2014) In a moment I shall consider theological responses of this kind from the traditions surveyed for this essay.

A philosopher-scholar concerned with engaging in ethical and at times theological reflections and debating theories of justice at large might nevertheless find in this field of discourse a fertile ground for mining conceptual resources and mapping certain blind spots and lacunae present in the human moral menagerie. The analogy here is to the sudden ripples felt in the hitherto paternally constructed moral systems: in ethics, justice, law, penal codes, "rights of man" discourse, toleration, inclusiveness, and so forth. Particularly when it was discovered that slaves, women, people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, indeed even minorities and "aliens" (foreigners), may be eligible to make claims on a par with the privileged select group to fairness, liberty, basic capabilities building and certain rights that entail duties toward equitable treatment on the part of the state or the dominant majoritarian group, and rendering opportunities toward flourishing of the individual of the marginalized groups. Moral antinomies seethe but may not be immediately detected where one principle can lead to two contrary, if not clashing, derivative outcomes. There might be blood on the other (gloved) hand. If, that is, there are antinomies in respect of human disposition toward animals, their welfare, treatment or neglect in moral considerations. (Singer 1993) The staunch rationalists may not see real problems with this scenario as animals are not beneficiaries in their view of the same moral subjective status, for instance, as moral agents, moral patients, individuals with equal inherent values, interests and rights, or jural entities in legal terms. They are lacking in moral considerability because they cannot represent their own interests and recognize such claims, and therefore they cannot be wronged. And this disavowal is made despite talk of "natural duties," duty of justice as fairness (via Rawls), non-cruelty/humane treatment, conservation of species or sustainability in the face of ecological degradation and concomitant environmental responsibility. But what does this all say about the reach and desired completeness, much less absoluteness, righteousness, of humanly conceived morality or be it moralism? Can non-humans be accorded moral significance or, more technically, moral considerability, and to what degree? There are

numerous debates on the intricacies of each of these tropes in the spaces symbolically occupied between humans and animals in our modern times (philosophy, cultural studies, feminism, and pop, media, and film cultures also). The question I am interested in is where do the religions of the world and philosophy of religion at large locate themselves in this challenging and burgeoning debate?

I ask these questions because today's animal rights/liberation movements are based largely on moral-philosophical considerations with secular and legal sensitivities rather than on religious or religion-informed philosophies; (Regan 1987) someone like Peter Singer chastises religion (and he means largely Western/Abrahamic traditions but also obliquely "India," meaning Indian religions), for their animosity toward animals or at least their allegedly deplorable treatment. And yet the early roots of animal welfare—for example, RSPCA/SPCA, anti-cruelty codes, and first vegetarian movements—were all either Christian or Jewish based; not to mention the vegetarianism of Pythagoreans; a few among the Stoics, Manichaeans, and Renaissance Europeans; certain ascetic monk orders; seventeenth-century British radical luddites; and nineteenth-century teetotalers. We may note here Henry Salt's Vegetarian Society of London, that re-inspired Gandhi's vegetarianism, the Seventh-Day Adventist who started Sanitarian Foods worldwide, and the British Jewish vegan who established the Animals Friend Society and co-founded Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Gompertz 1824, 1852; Singer 1992). However, there have been movements within Christian and Jewish theologies, and grassroots activism in the West, as well as in Israel and India, to revive or re-interpret orthodox texts and furnish fresh theo-philosophical grounds for the same arguments and ends that secular animal rights advocates have been striving toward (cf. Linzey 1995; Weisberger 2003). Morality can have many homes; it is not the exclusive proclivity of the secular, often post-enlightenment utilitarian philosophers, or a handful of peace-loving leftist activists. Indeed, as Mary Midgley has pondered all her philosophical life, might one argue that morality has its early roots in religion and could remain, in part at least, grounded in religion (Midgley, 1998; Epstein 2017).

My task in the rest of the essay is to present the respective representations of and attitude toward animals in as broad a compass as possible: Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina, Jewish and Christian, Gandhi and of the modern secular West. My concern is not with details, but rather how Hindu (and to an extent Jaina) and Judaism position themselves on the challenges of theodicy and on animal utilization, in the light of current philosophical and scientific speculations on the supposed sentience of animals, and the moral ramifications thereof (Griffin 2001, 1–17). That is to say, how the traditions look upon the life-status of animals and justify, or rationalize, the many topographies of evil in

respect of the animal kingdom. These topographies include suffering, harm, unnecessary or untimely death, nakedly at the hands of nature (climatic, environmental, inter/intra-species tussles, uncontrollable diseases, etc.) but also, and increasingly in greater proportion, in the hands of (hu)mankind. A framing question I will be addressing is the extent to which orthopraxies have informed ethical views in these traditions, and vice versa. For example, we need to ask at what point and with what degree of compunction or complicity does Judaic thought move from the explicit vegetarianism of the Genesis 1:29 (cf. 2:15–16) to homologizing women and (fowl-smelling) animals, and considering flesh as food? We might likewise ask that of Christianity as well in respect of the declarations in Psalms 104:14 and 136:25.

On the Brāhmaṇic-Hindu side, would animal sacrifice in the erstwhile *yajñās* of Vedism have ever sparked off moral conscience vis-à-vis *hiṃsā* (injury/violence), had it not been for Jaina and Buddhist disquiet against the grain of *ahiṃsā* (a simple act of adding the negative "*naṅ*"—prefix: a moral term that likely did not exist in Brāhmaṇism before the rupture)? Thereafter, Hindu texts rise to the occasion and increasingly become staunch advocates of animal care, welfare, proper husbandry, treatment, and hospitality, in proportion to the inclusion of animal imagery in religious symbolism and deification. To ignore such penal ordinances (e.g., in *Arthaśāstra, Dharmasūtras, Nibandhas*, several *Purāṇas, Mahābhārata*) would be to risk punitive measures and expiation of the demerit (*prāyaścitta*), here and hereafter. Is modern Hinduism even as it becomes more secular (cf. Hindu Code Bills), McDonalized, and globalized, after the Gandhian interlude, far behind in abrogating the moral inclusiveness of animals in a reformed Hindu ethos? Or will the evangelism and self-righteousness of Hindutva with its almost absolute embracing, or "revivification" of vegetarianism likely to alienate secular Indian animalists, by underscoring more the orthodoxly religious rather than the moral grounds? Still, India boasts the largest number of *faith-based* vegetarians, followed by Israel (not, mind you, North America, despite its South Asian population and New Age-ist movements), but only since the 1970s. And there isn't a similar upscale movement in much of Europe-UK, the Latin/South Americas, the Middle-East, or the Oceania-Pacific, and the rest of Asia for that. (Schwatrz 1998)

B. RITES OVER RIGHTS: WESTERN ORIGINS OF SANCTIFIED FLESH CONSUMPTION

Here I should like to present some standard, let us say, "official," theological views and follow this up with moral hermeneutical critiques in terms of their relevance and ethical reach toward contemporary challenges and changes in

the animal habitat or treatment brought about by technological and consumer-based developments, and other "innovative" methods.

The *Torah*, Genesis 1.26, states: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (English Standard Version; Wansbrough 1985)

Genesis: 1.29 suggests that people were initially vegetarians living on seed-bearing plants that God gave them. It wasn't until after the Flood (Genesis 9.3) that flesh of animals was permitted for food, and after the Exodus from Egypt that animal sacrifice also became permissible. (Jeremiah 7:22–23) But this appeared to have been short-lived and was never intended to be an absolute prescription. (Exodus 1989; Jeremiah, 2016).

Of course, the Christian Bible did not interpret 1.26 in the light of 1.29, and took "dominionship" rather literally. Thus evolved the idea of "man's prelapsarian stewardship over the rest of nature": God had created nature that it may serve Man. The Jewish tradition, by contrast, has been more circumspect. The key principle or moral intuition that seems to have been the guiding force is the prohibition of inflicting suffering on living creatures—*tsa'ar ba'alei chayim* (in Hebrew). There seems to be some recognition in rabbinical rulings of the physical, psychological, and emotional suffering of animals, and, hence, the innumerable prohibitions against the overuse, recklessness toward and abuse of animals, whether in farming practices, extracting labor from animals, or in human dietary preferences and practices. Religious laws derived from this basic moral intuition have reinforced the duty humans have toward non-human animals; however, in practice and especially religious and secular rites, there have been certain ambivalences and inconsistencies that modern scholars (as we shall illustrate) have been at some pain to point out.

Whereas hunting and games that involve the death of animals are prohibited as these serve no religious purpose, still, animals can be slaughtered for food, but only by sanctioned specialists who offer certain prayers in the process, and see to it that blood is fully drained from the flesh, and so forth. This rule, along with blessings offered at the table, ritualizes the consumption of flesh. (Grandin 1990) Naturally deceased animals cannot for that reason be used for food, but their by-products, especially the skin and horns, may be taken for other purposes. Even today, animal products are used in religious rituals: skin and leather for the scrolls, mezuzah and the tefillin, the shofar blown at Rosh Hashanah, and Kosher meat is permitted on Shabbat and Pesach (what we call the Passover feast), and in daily meals as well. These Jewish dietary laws are given in the *Torah*, and the basic ones are:

> Certain animals may not be eaten at all. Only animals that are ruminant (chew its cud) and have split hooves may be eaten.
>
> Of the animals that may be eaten, the birds and mammals must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law.
>
> All blood must be drained from the meat or broiled out of it before it is eaten.

Meat (the flesh of birds and mammals) cannot be eaten with dairy (Leviticus 11:39–40, 1989; Weisberger 2003, 81; Gilmore 2015, 123; Shimon 2017).

But what exactly is the significance of kashrut (religious dietary laws) and kosher (food that meets the laws) and their implications for moral thinking on animals? Do animals have any rights beyond being part of human rites? Should we talk of animal *rites*, rather than animal *rights* (the pun is intended to underscore an ambiguity in classical thinking)? Thus, is there something ambiguous in allowing the beasts of burden to rest on the Sabbath? And yet, apart from enforced rest and strictures on creative work, there seems to be concern for animals underscored in the prohibition against animals laboring on the day of rest (Genesis 2017, 8:1). Is a full-fledged vegetarianism ever entailed in the beneficence shown to animals (Exodus 21:28)? Do we get close to minimal rights of animals in the Hebrew codes? Notwithstanding the fact that the noble proscriptions and duties that moral agents have required to exercise toward animals are purely for safeguarding humane impulses, as Weisberger (2003, 79) points out, these duties do not stem from a recognition *ipso facto* rights that animals might be said to have as animals. Thus cheeseburgers are not kosher. But this speaks little of the animal as such, nor trumps any claims the animal might wish to represent in their own interests. Likewise, the moral ambiguity surrounding the "beasts of burden" (animals that carry loads, such as donkeys) being able to rest on the Sabbath. But the strict adherence here underscores more a religion-based requirement than a moral understanding as such. Elsewhere, however, feeding the animals before feeding humans and allowing animals to have a right in the fruits of their labor seem to be "based on a recognition of an inter-species moral relationship," that is, entitlement ensuing from investment of labor (Weisberger 2003, 79). The subjective qualities of animals possessing desires, feelings, and needs are given due accord. This is more clearly marked in the prohibition against taking a bird's egg from the nest while the mother is present. Either this is in recognition of the mother's ownership, hence, right over her own egg, or it may be in recognition of the same kind of attachment that humans have to their offspring: and it would be brutal in both instances to sever that connection. But the beneficence shown in these rules are constrained in two other areas, as I shall explain.

When an animal kills or mauls any human person, according to Maimonides (Weisberger 2003, 79), that animal is tried in a court of twenty-three judges

and sentenced to death, destroyed (while its flesh is not to be eaten), and the owner may be charged with homicide as well. It is strange, however, that moral agency is imputed on the animal when an animal kills out of its own volition, or some instinctual tendency. This renders the animal a jural entity, which no modern law accords to (though the animal, such as the American pit bull terrier that mauled a child in Australia was instantly destroyed). It is curious, however, that when animals are herded away to the slaughterhouses, notwithstanding the supervision of rabbis present that apparently ensure that proper religious process is followed, animals are not given the right to defend themselves against being killed by humans, for their own dietary drives! "Oh Lord, thou preservest man and beast (Psalm 36.7)," but not when mauled in slaughterhouse 3, as it were. It would seem crueller to accord moral agency and a mock-right to self-defense in a mocking court, where an impending capital punishment is a foregone conclusion, then to foreclose the same right when the killing is in the reverse direction; this is not a bilateral arrangement, nor balanced in the inter-species inclusion of animals in the human community.

Coming to the contemporary times, has orthodox and liberal Judaism countenanced the arguments of one of their own Israeli-Jewish animal liberationists and liberal Rabbis, declaring that the consumption of meat is now halachically unacceptable, and they blame Judaism for sanctioning slaughter of animals for food that through Christianity and Islam also has become a mainstay of Western culture? Although most do not dismiss Judaism for that moral fault, but rather work to build a new moral metaphysics and set of practices to honor more rigorously the originary moral intuitions (Kremmer, 2012, chapter 6).

C. WHEN KOSHER AIN'T KOSHER ANYMORE—IN THE FEED-LOT ENCLOSURE

Modern challenges and practices of procuring meat have radically transformed since the industrial revolution and, much more so, with the corporatization of the hitherto village-based animal farming practices. Critics in the secular-rational-utilitarian realms are all too aware that the meat industry is a heinously macabre enemy of the animal rather than its friend, for the industry treats animals as almost inanimate objects to be slaughtered and delivered to the dining table of their consumers, who are for most part blindfolded from the process and deceptions involved in the manufacture of the meat products and by-products. So if today's meat comes from the same abusive factory farms as all other meat, notwithstanding, the rabbinical or hallal supervision and/or intervention to see to it that prescriptive rules are followed, there are no

standards to ensure that the act of slaughtering is any less cruel or is humanely carried out (e.g., not killed before being stunned). In some instances, it has been shown to be much worse. According to animal industry sleuths, such as PETA, the rabbinical supervisor is literally kept in the dark or is complicitous with the deceptive process and is not inclined to report back to his synagogue the cruelty that takes place in the slaughterhouse in the name of *kosher* compliance (and the instant issuing of Kashrut Certification).

Furthermore, while the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic teachings that have in part informed the emergence of the modern industrialized world emphasize the importance of protecting human health, the consumption of animal products is said to be responsible for numerous diseases, including heart disease, which is a perilous threat to human life. Just when over 1.8 billion people across the world do not have enough food to sustain themselves with, our carnivorous diets are at least ten times as wasteful of food resources as a vegetarian one (PETA Animal Rights 2017; Modern Farmer, 2013; Pollan 2006).

We can speak of the number of animals killed and how many end up in well-intended dining and festive-celebratory tables. Animals slaughtered in the United States amounted to nearly 10.2 billion land animals and 52 billion sea animals in 2010 (going up by a few million each year). So, that means a total of about 63 billion animals per annum. This USDA figure does not include another 875 million animals that died lingering deaths from disease, injury, starvation, suffocation, maceration, or other atrocities of animal farming and transport; nor those in the wilderness killed by hunters, game-shooters, in shelters, animal testing, and experimentations. We may add to these statistics, wildlife displaced by animal agriculture and human habitat developments, construction of dams, new housing zones, roads, waterways, and so on, and wildlife directly killed by farmers with the use of pesticides, traps, Monsanto's terminator seeds, and other methods.

There is also concern among ecologists and environmentalists on the huge impact that the massive meat industry has on natural resources, drainage on the land, water usage, pollution from the methane gas that cattle and waste from the slaughterhouses emit, and other unmitigated consequences of the carnivorous fealty (Pollan 2006). Animals have become just another fodder to the excesses of human desires and exploitative lifestyle.

The question arises: Why do we not grant the same legal protections to animals while they are on the farm as we do in the case of domestic pets, which may be given full funeral rites upon their death? What has happened to the principle of universalization and universalizability that the Enlightened fathers, notably Kant, put forward? But, of course, they had not conceived of a *sui generis* animal ethic at all. Preference negative utilitarianism that argues for the reduction of animal pain does not unqualifiedly use the language of

universal rights and equal moral universalizability of the rights claims for animals; it speaks of duty of care and respect and regards for the interests and suffering of animals, on a par with human sentient beings, as one has toward one's undeaged children and aged parents (more usually than not in hospice care).

D. THE INDIAN ANIMAL: ANIMALS AND ECOLOGY IN THE PRE-VEDIC AGE TO THE PURĀṆAS

It is generally believed that the people during the period of Vedic civilization (spanning 1500–500 BCE) domesticated several herbivorous wild animals (Bilimoria and Sridhar 2017, 299). They trained those animals for use in agriculture, travel, and hunting. Their settlements were on river banks, amidst dense jungles and forests, and, hence, they maintained a close relationship with the natural environment. They superimposed a supernatural force on every aspect of nature and worshipped these. Trees and animals were objects of adoration, and they treated them as the manifestations of a higher order (*ṛta*).

Hence, it is why the cow occupies a pride of place in several hymns of the *ṚgVeda*. The cow, its variegated species, and habitat are described in the texts in glamorous details. The sages considered the cow as the personification of motherhood, fertility, and liberty. The cow was compared to the goddesses such as *Pṛṣṇi*, *Āditi*, and *Uṣās*. Rain was regarded as nothing other than the milk pouring from the udder of a cow. It is not surprising that, in the early Vedic period, the cow was killed for sacrifice as the main offering (*havis)*, because it was seen to have such a resemblance to the deities, and this earthly "good" might well be sufficient to please the gods who would, for their part of the bargain, return rain and calves a plenty (*RV* I.16.114.10, *RV*X.169.3/ II.7.5 X.91.14). The cow, like the horse, was also given in sacrifices as a "gift" (*dakṣiṇā)*. The cow, owing to her apparent intelligence, patience, and acquiescence, was adjudged as among the best sacrificial animal *(yājñiya paśu*). As Laurie Patton (2000, 43) noted,

> . . . as many Vedic hymns and later ritual texts . . . indicate, sacrifice of an animal into the fire was part of the ecological balance in the ancient Vedic world; the killing and distribution of the animal was part of a larger understanding of human harmony with natural forces.

The Ṛgvedic people then regarded animals as an integral part of their agrarian and pastoral culture. The deification of animals, apart from the sacrificial theology, probably also indicated a gesture toward animistic beliefs among the

indigenous and non-Āryan groups in the region (Bilimoria and Sridhar 2017, 300). So it wasn't that there was total, unconditional prohibition of the consumption of animal flesh, whether from the sacrificial offerings or from other sources (Jha 2001, 2–31).

The lesson to be gleaned here is that, historically, the killing of animals and their distribution otherwise was part of a larger hermeneutic of the harmony of the human life-world with the natural forces; and, for the nonce, what it might mean to re-disperse the natural world in the process of rejuvenation, and what it might mean to hasten the processes of life and death; and how the tropes of harmony with nature *and* sacrifice could well converge in a kind of redistributive justice in the context of the natural environment (ibid). Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the Vedic ethos did not entirely rescind the Brāhmaṇical right to perform animal sacrifices, which is indeed a form of *hiṃsā* or violence. The Jainas and later Buddhists who emerged in the scene and became socially and indeed politically and theologically active denounced the Brāhmaṇical proclivity to rites that lead to the harming of animals; the Jainas practiced a very strict form of nonviolence as part of their daily and protracted vow of noninjury to all sentient beings. The Buddhists under the inspiration of King Aśoka, even went as far as to establish hospitals and shelters for injured and abandoned animals. This benign *śrāmāṇic* (stoical) attitude toward animalkind was to have a huge impact on the Brāhmaṇical ethos as it evolved into the Purāṇic culture (Bilimoria and Sridhar 2017, 315).

Apart from registering the unity of all sentient (*cetana*) and non-sentient (*acetana*) beings, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (15.46) informs us that gods, men, animals, reptiles, and birds are but the various forms of the creator Brahmā since these have emerged from his limbs (Bilimoria and Sridhar 2017, 304–05). Mention is also made of the need to safeguard the interests and needs for times yet to be: *bhaviṣya.* It is interesting that such a future-regarding comparison is made back in the *Purāṇa.* And so the argument by the best inference goes a fair way toward supporting an ecological perspectivism that is not confined contingently to the interests and needs of the current generation, but factors in the predictable depletion of resources exacerbated by the excesses (e.g., exponential) growth of the population burdensomely on Mother Earth, which more than likely will prove detrimental, if not catastrophic, to the needs and interests of the future generations (*bhaviṣyaloka*), to which they have equal entitlement. This is not only the mark of good ecology but decent moral philosophy also.

Early Indians took great care in keeping the animal environment clean. *Garuda Purāṇa* (201.35–39) prescribes the following medicinal herbs for keeping the elephants healthy: myrobalans (Terminalia chebula), *haritakī* (*Chebulic myrobalan*), and Solanum indicum (*bṛhatī*) (Bilimoria and Sridhar 2017, 308). Pastes of several medicinal herbs are recommended for curing

several ailments of elephants. Aśoka, the Buddhists, much later likewise built hospices and veterinarian units for ailing animals.

In the *Arthaśāstras*, heinous and gratuitous acts against animals are punishable in respect to their neglect, overuse, abuse, stealing, letting run amock, even negligence by veterinarians, and so on in the interest also of maintaining eco-balance.

E. ANIMALS AND THE CONCEPT OF NONVIOLENCE (AHIṂSĀ)

The common ethos emerging through the reflections of *Purāṇas,* Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstras* (321–296 BC) and the epics appears to be this: it is part of the *dharma* of the *rājānīti* (sovereignty) that the king and his ministries maximize protection and maintenance of all beings and species that belong to the earth (*bhauma*) (Olivelle 2013).

The treatises on ethics and religion (*Dharmaśātras* and *Smṛti*s), the two epics (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), and ancient lore (*Purāṇa*) emphasized the fourfold values of life—earning (*artha),* pleasures (*kāma*), duties (*dharma),* liberation (*mokṣa*)—that could be practiced in two ways, that is, an active life in this world (*pravṛtti)* and renunciation of the world (*nivṛtti*) (Bailey and Rukmini 2000). The virtues exalted in these *Smṛti* canons—in contradiction to those in the *Śruti* or Vedic tradition—arguably led to the development of noninjury (*ahiṃsā*) in dharmic traditions. A more compassionate leaning paved the way for a more successful development of nonviolent sacrifices in which pulses, cereals, and ghee were substituted for animals in the sacrificial fire (*MBh* Śāntiparvan). The *Mahābhārata* declared noninjury as the highest duty to be performed by an individual. The *Bhagavadgītā* provides quasi-philosophical grounding for the values extolled in the *Mahābhārata* and is more decisive in its ethical pronouncements. It is for this reason that the *Gītā* (for short) has had a profound impact on modern Hindu-Indian thought and is drawn upon obliquely in Western ethical and ecological deliberations as well (Gandhi 1962; Naess 1989, 194; Jacobsen 1996, 231–233; Larson 1989; Chapple and Tucker 2000).

Several commentators, including the eighth-century doyen of Vedānta philosophy, Śaṅkara, have observed that the feeling of pain is universalized so as to derive a principle of empathy and noninjury. Śaṅkara characteristically commented that one who sees that what is painful and pleasant to himself is painful and pleasant to all creatures, will cause no living beings pain, and that he who is noninjurious is the foremost of yogins (Śaṅkara 1976, 198–199; Bilimoria & Hutchings 1988, 36).

Self-realization in the *Gītā* takes due cognizance of the moral principle of *lokasaṃgraha*, the well-being of all sentient beings. The world of living things is brought together in a process governed by moral cause-effect relationships and it makes it imperative for each being within it to respect the autonomy, the interests, and destiny of the other, and ultimately to find a way out of the cyclic implications of this process (Bilimoria 2007; 2017).

F. GANDHI AND CONTEMPORARY INDIA: ANIMAECOLOGY

Let me now move to certain contemporary narratives. I will begin with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was acutely aware that the demands generated by the need to feed and sustain human life compounded with the growing industrialization of India, if not of the world at large, far outstripped the finite resources of nature. This might appear naïve and commonplace with the onset of the twenty-first century, but such pronouncements were rare as they were heretical at the turn of the twentieth century. Gandhi was also adamant about the need for a rigorous ethic of noninjury in the human treatment of animals. In other words, Gandhi was invoking the Jaina principle of *ahiṃsā* that he had learned about from his Jain mentor, Srimat Raychandrabhai, and the role that it might play in the expanding circle of moral care; that is, in more rigorous ways than the Jains had practiced in their understandably restrictive religious contexts. More passionately, on active environmental renewal projects, Gandhi wrote in 1926 that for India the next step should not be agriculture that is destructive but rather the planting of plethora of fruit trees and other vegetation as these provide nourishment, stability in the soil, and attract rainfall as well as provide fodder for the insect and animal world (Gandhi 1959, 34–35). He was even worried about silk and wool extractions, and therefore proposed their replacement exclusively with *khadi* (mix of cotton and linen). The implications of such simple ecological wisdom have only just begun to dawn on tech-fested agriculture production economics. (Sanford 2013). Gandhi saw vegetarianism as a moral cause, even once stating that he would prefer death to consuming some beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice. He saw the life of a lamb as being no less precious than that of a human being. In his little known lecture delivered in London in 1931, "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism," Gandhi asserts, "[M]an was not born a carnivorous animal, but born to live on the fruits and herbs that the earth grows" (Gandhi 1931; cf. Regan 1975). To Gandhi, vegetarianism was not just a religious principle, but a moral obsession that he spent much time and effort working on and perfecting to the tee. But this also underscores his commitment to the moral considerability of animal life. There is of course the

famous quote, often attributed to Mohandas Gandhi (but likely not uttered by him in these precise terms), that suggests that the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

We see some of Gandhi's thinking reflected in modern-day animal liberation/rights thinking, for instance, in Peter Singer's argument that the morality of actions should not be determined exclusively in terms of human interests, rather that since animals indisputably have the ability to feel pain and pleasure (i.e., they have sentience), it would be wrong to intentionally cause suffering in animals. This general doctrine of sentientism is meant to be a corrective to the prelapsarian specter of speciesism. One would have to be a "species-ist" to believe that animals are not as deserving of freedom from suffering and subordination brought about by human interests (from agriculture, farm-feed lots, slaughterhouses, to circuses), as is a race of people who are subjugated by another race without justification. Of course, by the same token, one cannot be over-romantic according to this view, about the special "rights," and so on, on the part of the "animal species," for this would be tantamount to "reverse species-ism" (analogous to "reverse orientalism"). Rather, a non-anthropocentric and non-species-ist moral perspective is derivable from at least negative utilitarianism that underscores human responsibility to nature rather seriously, principally by including animals in the "expanding" moral community of individuals and by not allowing human interests to subordinate the well-being of animals without justification. On this view, vegetarianism is said also to be morally compelling, for it is only out of selfish human interest, for food and feeling well, that one would have an animal mauled, killed and consumed, with relish. One might as well eat one's (or another's) pet(s) (Singer 1990, 2009; Finsen and Finsen 1994, 84–180). However, there are arguably political and economic constraints where this involves people whose only means of survival is in consuming animal flesh; they do not have the choice nor the means to produce or purchase vegetarian-based edibles (let alone vegan). And their livelihood too may be dependent on raising animals for and/or working in slaughterhouses. This is a case made for many a tribal, subaltern, indigenous, Dalit and also Muslim groups in India.

A contemporary Gandhian ethical argument for discontinuing the slaughter and consumption of the cow (ox, bull, buffalo, or cattle), controversial as this positioning is in today's India, has been taken up by Maneka Gandhi (wife of the late Rajeev Gandhi, and daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi). Her strident animal rights campaign works through petitioning; the parliament and the legislature as well as maintaining voluntary animal rescue hospices; and one of her major targets has been the slaughterhouses, abattoirs along the Yamuna River, and tanneries along the Ganga, which have been the major source of pollution of the waters in recent decades.

CONCLUSION

It can be surmised from the above discussions that Brāhmaṇic thought was compelled by the forceful moral concept of noninjury championed by Buddhist and Jaina protagonists, and so it moved to a more universalistic and pragmatic stratagem. Likewise, modern-day Asian philosophies (from South, to Southeast, and East Asia) may have yet to learn some more from these traditions and cultures, and also Western-secular animal freedom activism—given their traditional amoral praxis, both in respect of sacrificial offerings and human consumption (except for pockets of East Asian Buddhist and Daoist monastic practices). The concept of *ahiṃsā* helped change the ancient outlook of a nomadically-driven people and brought about a rejection of the violence involved and perpetrated in Vedic sacrifices. It further helped develop the aligned aspects of noninjury in catalogue of virtues in ethics of the epics and other *dharma* canons, fledgling to begin with, alongside the Hindu and libertarian ideals of toleration, forgiveness, and equanimity.

Thus, animals, trees, and fauna, for their part as participating subjects, could be said to have played a significant role, directly or indirectly, in the development of Indian morality and the practice of preservation of the environment around them. At some point in history, Indians could consider it a moral accomplishment to live in harmonious association with fauna and flora without disturbing the eco-components of nature. Whether in real-life practice and in their polity they achieved this or not remains in some doubt and a subject of much debate (Spivak 1999, 46–58; Crawford 2005, 222–227). However, ethics as a moral philosophy is not always measured by its practical success (consider the numerous problems with utilitarianism, perhaps the most "successful" Western ethics closer to our times, that philosophers, including Amartya Sen, have been pointing out), but by its conceptual coherence and broadness of vision. The sentient and the non-sentient creatures and things of nature became increasingly, in the philosophical and devotional (including tāntric or wildly esoteric) orientated schools in particular, a part of microcosm that is seen to be integral to the macrocosm. The forest universities imparted teaching amidst sylvan surroundings. The denizens of forests and jungles drew minimal food from nature for their survival, thus allowing the periodical regrowth of forests. People who committed crime on animals were severely dealt with through stringent laws. They propounded the philosophy of unitary consciousness in all the creatures of the world and cautioned against the indiscriminate killing of these creatures. This holistic approach grew slowly, but appreciably, such that in our times there can be a Gandhi, an Albert Schweitzer (also influenced by Jaina ethics), Arne Naess, the Dalai Lama, Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Medha Patkar, Sunderlal

Bahuguna (a staunch Gandhian), Maneka Gandhi, among others, who are able to command or claim a voice in the global movement toward environmentalism and sustainability. And they pursue their respective callings without compromising to the globalization of industrial capital interest that remains impervious to the epistemic and social-ontological violence of instrumental rationalism, with its single-minded pursuit of money economy. They excelled the Vedic ritualists and fishermen of yore, who used animals to appease the gods or provide nourishment to an immediate community.

In this chapter I have compared the different perspectives on animals and their fate at the hands of instrumentalist-minded human beings, and looked for responses or alternatives in the human treatment of animals across two traditions, Judaism and Hinduism. I have considered historical as well as contemporary responses in both traditions. At the end of the day, or the modern era, what we can learn from the wrongs and rights of the traditions (ancient, through medieval to modern day) is this: we should like to think that human beings are intelligent and rational enough to be able to come to terms with the fact that they have certain basic duties to other species in the common eco-sphere. (Sorabji 1993) These duties may be consistent with principled virtues on the part of human beings—individual and collective—principally, not to harm, not to disturb, not to forgo trust, be willing to make restitution, be compassionate. Furthermore, these duties may ensue either in recognition of the rights of other species *or* a deep respect for the interests and values of other species and biospheres (verily in the Levinasian sense than that acceded by analytical or classical utilitarian ethics). While a morally stronger case can be made by basing the argument on interests and values than on the moral rights of animals, there is no reason why animal ethics need to favor one over the other. It would seem to me that an ethics based on deep empathy in the face of the other—of the kind that Jane Goodall has been advocating based on her relentless work among chimpanzees—is well-nigh indispensable. More specifically, an argument toward "moral respect for *animals*"—on a par with Paul Taylor's (1986) "ethics of respect for *nature*"—can only be strengthened by finding a mean between rights and interests. There are ample resources for this bridgebuilding strategy in all religions, not least in the South Asian religious traditions but also in Judaism, particularly when we bring contemporized critical hermeneutical lens to their respective texts.

NOTES

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Chapter 7

Lethal Wives and Impure Widows

The Widow Marriage Taboo in Jewish and Hindu Law and Lore

Shoshana Razel Gordon Guedalia

Parallel study of Jewish and Hindu sources of law and lore pertaining to widow marriage reveals an extant taboo in both traditions.[1] The Biblical high priest may not wed a widow, nor, *prima facie*, may Brahmans—the Vedic priestly class. This suggests a common link between the need for maintaining pristine purity for priestly rites and the sense of greater ritual impurity inherent in widows. Ritual-legal necessity aside, both Jewish *Halakha* and Hindu *Dharmaśāstra* accumulated layers of attitudinal taboo, each along its traditional evolution, much like dust on well-worn wagon wheels, as impure widow practicum yielded lethal wife taboo. While the Talmud deems a twice- or thrice-widowed woman "lethal," due to physical malady or astrological inauspiciousness, tradition evolves to increasingly treat her as religio-legally barred from marrying. *Śāstra* tradition comes to stress widow-culpability—due to her lack of nurturing capacity, past incarnational infractions, or astrological inauspiciousness. *Śāstra* manuals increasingly slate widows for ascetic privation, lest indulgence harm the extra-worldly status of the deceased,[2] till an alternative arises: *Satī.* She may ascend her husband's pyre as fire retires her blame. Yet even as these taboos spread, scholars in each system challenged them, using similar, while tradition-specific, hermeneutic tools and rhetorical styles, to unravel law (*dharmaśāstra/halakha*) from taboo (*kusaṃskāra/makrūh*), to weigh competing oughts: systemic preservation and shock-of-conscience remedy; to spare the vulnerable from harm[3] inflicted under guise of law. We examine two such scholars: twelfth-century Andalusian rabbi Moses Maimonides and nineteenth-century Bengali pandit Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar—each of whom, within their singular milieu, freed women from the mire of the widow marriage taboo.

AUTHORITATIVE TREATISES AND LEGAL SOURCE STRATA

In her masterful comparative work, *Veda and Torah,* Barbara Holdrege depicts both authoritative treatises and corresponding systems, "brahmanical," and "rabbinic," in a manner akin to expressing commonality between plant types:

> Two species of the same genus of "religious tradition," as ethnic-based communities that define their notions of tradition-identity in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural categories; as "textual communities" that codify their symbol systems and practices in the form of scriptural canons; and as religions of orthopraxy that delineate their concern for "correct practice" in elaborate legal systems, sacrificial traditions, and purity codes. The essential feature that unites these various aspects is that of embodiment: embodiment in a particular ethnic community with a sacred language, social structure, and practices that are constituted in relation to the Word embodied in scripture. (Holdrege, 1996, 403)

Articulating systemic commonalities of these "embodied communities," each in their terms, sets the stage for our foray into rabbinic and brahmanical widow marriage polemics. We begin by sketching out each system-specific authoritative legal source hierarchical schema.

Torah and Veda are respective names for the scriptures of Jewish and Hindu law. While the former is taken as revelatory, and the latter, cognized (Holdrege, 1996, 325). Scripture, highest on the legal source totem pole, trumps lower proof texts for religio-legal rulings. *Derabbanan,* rabbinic law, and *smṛti* are codes of remembered tradition, each seen as second tier legal source in their particular system. The rabbinic corpus includes Mishnah, sealed in the third century CE, fleshed out in the Talmud, sealed circa the sixth century CE,[4] followed by commentarial literature of generations, as cultural trappings accumulated along the evolutionary path of tradition. A rationalist, twelfth-century Maimonides was scrupulous in ferreting out "foreign" influence, especially that rooted in what he deemed "superstition." The *smṛti* corpus includes the *sūtras* of Gautama, Āpastamba, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha, dating circa the last five centuries BCE, and the saṁhitās of Manu, Yājñavalkya, Nārada, and Parāśara, dating circa the first seven or eight centuries CE (Olivelle 2010, 46-48). Of note in tracing the widow marriage taboo is that Viṣṇu *smṛti*, seventh century CE, is the first source for *satī*, the custom of widows burning upon husbands' pyres—making this hard to peg as vedic in origin. (Kane, 1941, 624).

We now turn from discussing *smṛti* and *derabbanan,* second to Vedic *śruti* and Torah law, to the third tier, to *deśācāra* and *minhag hamakom*, respective

Hindu and Jewish terms for local practice, and to the principle of *sadācāra,* the praxis of good men,[5] a legal source, which seems to operate in a manner akin to the talmudic, *puk hazay mai ama dvar*, or "Go out and see what the people are doing,"[6] which talmudic rabbis use as proof text of last resort. Vidyāsāgar quotes the following source, which treats local custom in the same way:

> Where there is neither a clear injunction nor a clear prohibition in the Veda or the Smṛti, duty may be determined by consulting local custom and the custom of the lineage . . . in cases where there is no injunction or prohibition in the authoritative treatises, local custom is a source of proof. However, it makes no sense to abandon faith in the injunctions of the authoritative treatises in favor of local custom. (Vidyāsāgar, translated in Hatcher 2012, 200–201)

As to authority of local custom and custom based on lineage, there is a classic talmudic debate[7] as to whether one must observe the custom of the place he is in or the tradition passed down to him from his mother or father. The first falls under the category of the custom of Israel is law, while the second is based on Proverbs, "Hear, my son, the teaching of thy father, and do not abandon the tradition of thy mother."[8] As we will soon see, this very debate lies at the crux of the "lethal wife" matter taken on by Maimonides of Andalus, as well as at the heart of Vidyāsāgar's wrangling with the Bengali "widow marriage" taboo.

It is noteworthy, however—I contend—that customs, norms, and common praxis can and do serve in dichotomous roles as legal source in jurisprudential analysis. When Maimonides declares, "In *all* the lands of Andalus we have seen no court bar a woman dubbed 'lethal wife' from marrying," he is using the *puk hazay* (go-out-and-see) method, thus anchoring his ruling on human text, on praxis—while Vidyāsāgar, in his quest for social reform, *negates* local practice, reminding his readers that vedic *śruti* is first tier, *smṛti* codes, second, human text—*ācāra,* third. As we shall see, in nineteenth-century Bengal, it was the harshness of local custom, which served as an obstacle, rather than early canonical text. Whereas Maimonides roots his dismissal of the "lethal wife" taboo on its *not* being local Andalusian praxis, despite its talmudic source, Vidyāsāgar dismisses the widow marriage ban based on early authoritative *śāstric* sources, which allow such marriages, *despite* the ban in his Bengali milieu (Hatcher, 2014b). And yet, Maimonides too contended with "vile customs" treated as law, when responding to praxis explicated in letters from beyond Andalus, or from rival jurisdictions within. Both reformers struggled from within the mire:

> Although in principle the chief source (or "root," *mūla*) of *dharma* is supposed to be the sacred words *(śruti)* of the *Veda*, in practice the system relies mainly on *smṛti*, the collective remembrance of *Vedic dharma* embodied in the teachings of the great sages, and the customs (*ācāra*) of properly trained upper-caste Hindus—together constituting something quite like the rabbinic notion of "Oral *Torah*." (Lubin, Davis, and Krishnan, 2010)

Much as Maimonides reckoned mostly with rabbinic law and with customs and local praxis akin to *smṛti* and *ācāra*, so too Vidyāsāgar wrangled mostly with the bottom tier legal sources.

ON PRIESTLY PURITY AND ON RITUAL IMPURITY OF WIDOWS

Both "embodied communities" share common ritual need for maintenance of pristine purity, manifest, among other restrictions, in a ban, both on the biblical high priest (Lev. 21:14) as on brahmanical priests, against marrying widows. While seemingly linked to religio-legal practicum, both systemic bans seem to linger well beyond their era of ritual necessity.

We begin by examining this common historically lapsed ritual-legal need for barring widow marriage. Our conceptual premise can be described as a distinction between ritual efficacy and agency as competing oughts in ritual performance. If a ritual, such as sacrifice, is a recipe, we can easily understand that replacing chili powder for sugar does not a successful cake make. Entering the ritual efficacy cosmology requires comprehension that rituals can only yield ontological change—success—by following its precise guidelines as to ingredients, manner of use, if and what replacements may be made. People, in this cosmology, are but one ingredient (see Clooney, 1990, 163). Equity for ritual actor may be no more relevant than for clarified butter. Thus, the fact that in order to serve as ritual actor, priests must maintain a certain measure of ritually defined purity, negated by intimate contact with widows, displays neither moral nor value judgment of widows, nor do these laws relate in any way to matters of human equity.

Before considering widowhood through a ritual purity lens, we note that in Jewish tradition, the main taboo concern is marriage to twice- or thrice-widowed women (unless one is the one and only high priest), and that this concern dances between superstition and legal practice. In Hindu tradition, even once-widowed women seem to be deemed off-limits, as per law or *ācāra,* dependent on caste, and even on specific *yugas* (eons). Despite this system-specific distinction, the Hindu widow marriage taboo was practiced mainly in the Brahmin priestly class (and to an extent among the *kṣatriya*

warrior class). This recalls the *Torah* ban against the Jewish high priest, marrying even a *once*-widowed woman. Why is the high priest different from other *kohanim,* Temple priests, who are only banned from marrying divorcees? And what about *kohanim* precludes marrying divorcees, when the general public may marry divorcees as well as once-widowed women? The *kohanic* distinction comes from need for ritual purity maintenance, without which Temple rites could not be performed.[9] Beyond marriage bans, they also may not enter cemeteries, lest proximity to death defile them. How much more so, the high priest, who must maintain pristine purity, due to his particularly sensitive ritual role, which proves deadly if performed while defiled.[10] He, as human, is a holy vessel: pure instrument for divine rite and, thus, must not be defiled. Ritual impurity is strongly linked to death. Menstrual impurity can be seen as a state of impurity rendered by loss of potential life, a death of sorts, from which women must purify themselves, by *mikva* immersion, as per *halakha,* or by means of earth clumps or sprinkling water, as per *dharma*.

The following passages, one from *Parāśara Saṁhitā*, and the next, talmudic, show traditional similarity as to ritual impurity and menstruation: "The woman who does not bathe at the end of her period before serving her husband goes to the netherworld after death and is widowed again and again."[11] And as depicted in the following talmudic passage:

> Due to the following three things, women die in childbirth: Not taking proper care in matters of *Challah* [setting aside for the priests and the Temple of a portion of the dough], matters of *Nida* [menstrual purity], and lighting Sabbath candles. (Talmud B. Shabbat 31:2)

Note that the Hindu threat seems to affect future incarnations, or netherworld eons, while the threat to Jewish women is death in childbirth—death being the end of the punishment.

We turn now to the unique type of impurity associated with widows, depicted as those whose exposure to death can never be expunged. If such powerful impurity is indeed irrevocably inherent in widows, we understand why the high priest must not marry her, lest he be made terminally impure, and, thus, permanently banned from his Temple duties. Since the widow marriage ban was primarily a Brahmin custom, that of priests needing to maintain ritual purity, an important parallel is apparent, as the widow marriage ban applies to ritual practicum, so that priests may read Sanskrit, recite sacred mantras, and perform sacrifices.[12]

Thus, we find that in addition to other blame-tinged components in the evolution of widow marriage taboos, yielding even *satī*—superstition, politics, indissolubility of bond, spousal murder deterrent—there was originally a

ritual concern: ritual purity maintenance, ontologically threatened by intimate exposure to widows, in whom death impurity lingers.

In her translation of Tryambakayajvan, Julia Leslie (1989) quotes this eighteenth-century *dharma* scholar, describing cleansing rites for menstruating women: "A woman who is menstruating requires sixty lumps (of earth) to cleanse herself on the fourth day, a menstruating widow, twice as many" (74). This strengthens the notion that menstrual impurity is linked to death—menstruation as potential life lost. Death impurity is at least twofold in widows, who must purify themselves from loss of potential life, loss of husband's life, and loss of potential lives from him, which future cycles may have yielded. Doubling cleansing soil for widows implies that they are steeped deeper in ritual impurity than others.[13] Given both Jewish and Brahmin priestly ritual purity needs, the widow marriage ban was likely practical, to avoid irreparable rite-performance-inhibiting impurity. Proximity to death transfers impurity. If menstruating woman are impure due to loss of potential life, they must cleanse prior to the next cyclic life opportunity. Widows, defined by proximity to husband's death as irreparably impure are, thus, a tangible risk to priestly ritual performers.[14]

Historic lapse of ritual need for pristine purity maintenance, paired with our sense that the priestly ban on widow marriage was not "personal," might have us assuming that any such ban would have disappeared along with its defunct ritual function. And yet—much as is the case in other caste-related taboos—the widow marriage taboo continued for centuries after lapse of its ritual role. In his polemics against this taboo being touted by Brahmanical Bengali pandits in his time as law, said Vidyāsāgar:

> Since today there is no custom of performing the *Agnihotra* [sacrifice] or *Vedic* study [in purity], it follows that there is also no related custom of restricting periods of impurity. (Vidyāsāgar, trans. by Hatcher 2012, 149)

Despite this lack of religio-legal impetus, or perhaps due to the semiotic void created by lapse of sacrificial ritual need, ritual practicum concerns yield an ominous lethal wife taboo.

RITUAL PRACTICUM YIELDS LETHAL WIFE TABOO

Circa sixth century CE, in the evolving corpus of the Babylonian Talmud, in Sura and Pumpedita (Iraq today), and in Viṣṇu *smṛti*, a relatively late Dharmaśāstra code in Kashmir, we find our first evidence of a fierce widow marriage taboo picking up steam in both traditions, disconnected from any ritual-legal function.

In Talmud B. *Yevamot*, named for its focus on *yibum,* or, levirate marriage, among other topics, we find the following discussion as to widow marriageability:

> If a woman married a man and he died, and she then married another man, and he too died, she may not marry a third—this as per Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. And as per Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel—she may marry a third man, but if he too dies, she may not marry a fourth. We understand [asks the Talmud] that risk is established after two or three lethal circumcision cases, since thin blood can be hereditary, but what concern is there in marrying [twice- or thrice-widowed women]? Rav Mordechai said to Rav Ashi that Avimi of Hagronya said in the name of Rav Huna: Her wellspring is the cause [of her husband's death]. Rav Ashi said: Her inauspiciousness is the cause. And what is the practical difference between the two perspectives? (1) A case where the man died after engagement and before consummation of marriage, or (2) a case where he fell off a palm tree and died. (Talmud B. *Yevamot*, 64b-65a)

The Talmud says nothing about ritual purity needs when discussing a ban against marrying a twice- or thrice-widowed woman. Instead, the taboo discussed is represented as a health-related cautionary tale. This taboo follows precedentially established health risks associated with circumcising a third brother, when the first two died after circumcision. Thus, some sort of life-threatening suspicion is being cast upon the poor widow, who is causally linked to her husband's death, no matter his age, no matter if she were a child bride married to an octogenarian. Struggling a bit against what seemed to have been an uncomfortable assertion to take at face value, the rabbis work to define what nature of risk this woman could possibly pose to a man. Two suggestions are made: (1) Contagion: her wellspring (euphemism) is the cause. (2) "Mazal": her astrological designation makes her inauspicious to marry. And, in its indubitable style of utilizing test cases so as to establish parameters, the Talmud suggests a practical difference between these possible causes. If the wellspring stance is right, then the label "lethal" does not apply to women whose men died before consummation. If the inauspiciousness claim is right, then even without consummation, even if her man fell from a palm tree and died, she may be dubbed "lethal," due to her destiny to be widowed.

We remain perplexed, however, that the talmudic rabbis would give credence to the "lethal wife" belief, when it seems so clearly sourced in pagan superstition. Says Friedman:

> In condoning the superstition, the sages introduced a subtle reinterpretation of its nature, whereby they disavowed its manifestly pagan elements. *R. Eleazar* distinguished between divination, which the Torah prohibits, and allowing

> precautionary steps against an omen . . . *Rava* offered . . . a pseudo-medical explanation for the deaths: sexual contact. *R. Ashi* attributed them to astrology (*mazal*—planets). Such explanations could be considered compatible with the religion of the sages. (Friedman 1990, 56)

There are many known instances of talmudic sages speaking through tongues of temporal science and culture, to which what we deem superstition was common wisdom rather than trappings of alternate worship cosmologies.

Even as the Talmud is being redacted, in the sixth century Varāhamihira, a scholar in Ujjain, in central India, wrote the *Bṛhat-Saṁhitā*, in which he discusses omens, in which he challenges the veracity of the prevailing view that women were sinful in their essence (see Leslie 1989, 267). Both cultures grapple in parallel with this dangerous mix of lore and law. In fact, in that very era in Kashmir, we find in the Viṣṇu *smṛti*—alongside women being warned not to dabble in magic—the very first proof text of our taboo gone violent, as widows are advised to join deceased husbands in their pyre, as flames consume them both:

> Laws with respect to women: performing the same religious observances as her husband;[15] honoring her mother-in-law, father-in-law, elders, gods, and guests; maintaining properly the household goods; refraining from being a spendthrift; taking good care of household utensils; not being attached to root witchcraft;[16] being devoted to auspicious practices; not adorning herself when her husband is gone abroad;[17] not visiting the houses of strangers; not lingering by doors and windows; not acting independently in any activities;[18] remaining under the authority of her father during her childhood, her husband during her youth,[19] and her son in her old age; and remaining chaste or ascending the pyre after him when her husband dies. (VS, 25:1–14 in Olivelle 2004, 90)

Fascinating parallels to Jewish traditional maxims aside,[20] here we focus on the last line: "remaining chaste or ascending the pyre after him when her husband dies." This is the first reference in śāstra literature to *satī,*[21] to widows ascending deceased husbands' pyres, dying by fire with the body. It is hard to imagine a more powerful example of lore leading law astray.

The options open to a widow whose sacred marital duties came to an end seem to have been: *satī* or *tapas* (ascetic privation)—*punarbhū* (remarriage) being frowned upon. The blame narrative woven through this taboo generally avoids explicit implication of murderous intent, stressing, instead, inadvertent causes: inauspiciousness, destiny, ineffectual wifely care, deficiency in *sat,* in goodly nurturing capacity. Yet as blame it manifests nonetheless.

The life of *tapas,* of ascetic privation, seemingly the only honorable option for a widow, save for *satī*, is spelled out in the following, by eighteenth

century Tryambakayajvan, a contemporary of Rammohan Roy, who worked to outlaw *satī*:

> The wife who after her husband's death lives an ascetic and celibate life for the rest of her days, should live the subdued and restricted life . . . as opposed to the life of the married woman with all its outward signs of happiness and ornamentation. She should willingly mortify her body, living on flowers, roots and fruits; or . . . fruits vegetables and barley. She should eat only once a day, and . . . should perform regular severe fasts. She should wear undyed garments, no bodice, no perfumes or unguents. If she binds her hair on top of her head, she causes her husband to be bound in the other world. She should sleep on the ground, never on a high bed. She should not even mention the name of another man, nor have any sort of contact with him. (Tryambakayajvan, translated in Leslie 1991, 299)

The life of ascetic widowhood resembles that of renunciants—privation and mortification of flesh. Her earthly joy was tied to her husbandly service, thus, earthly joy is no longer hers. Her purpose is now ascetic praxis. Any lapse in mortification harms her husband's afterlife. She is blamed for his harm even once he's gone. While similar to renunciant life, ascetic widowhood differs in mobility restriction:

> Forsaking sons, brothers and other (male relatives) after her husband (dies) and living independently incurs condemnation. A woman may never act independently; as a widow, her dependence is simply transferred from husband to sons. Indeed, "the woman (i.e., widow) who is (truly) devoted to her husband should not do anything without (first) asking her sons." (Tryambakayajvan, translated in Leslie 1991, 300)

This ban on widowly independence seems reminiscent of the Lilith motif,[22] whereby female agency, mobility, sexual determination, autonomy, and selfhood are perceived as threat. Keeping widows mortified, needs but minimally met, under control of men in the house, there is no danger of a widow gaining Lilith-like destructive power—a primordial fear.

An especially onerous aspect of ascetic widowhood is the infliction of tonsure. Julia Leslie relays Tryambaka's thoughts on this custom:

> In South India today, widows are . . . tonsured after their husband's funeral but this is a late development calculated to bring the widow in line with other "renouncers." Tryambaka argues that "(rulings that prescribe) shaving the head apply to *Brahmin* women; (those prescribing) keeping the hair (long apply) to women of other castes." (Leslie 1991, 303)

We may guess from Tryambaka's warning to widows not to tie up their hair lest their husbands be tied up in the afterlife, that he did not envision widows as tonsured. Thus, shorn widows stood apart from society. Easy to recognize, they were singled out for scorn, pity, blame, and for any sentiment and ensuing treatment reserved for widows. In fact, while Vidyāsāgar's widow marriage legislation influenced the judiciary more than press and street:

> the one potential state action that did garner considerable support in the papers was a prohibition on tonsure, especially of young women . . . In a series of (possibly coached) essays written by nine widows in the Poona Widows and Orphans Home and sent to Sir Herbert Risley in 1911, the writers returned again and again to the torture and deformity that this practice visited upon young widows. The widespread heightened emotional response to this practice suggests . . . that this disfigurement of the widow facilitated her dehumanization. Abolishing tonsure thus formed a major initial step to her rehabilitation . . . that would render more difficult, perpetration of everyday cruelty against her by . . . family . . . [and] strangers. (Sturman 2012, 189).

Tryambaka ascribes tonsure specifically to *Brahmin* widows. Caste distinction is an important part of Vidyāsāgar's polemic against the widow marriage taboo. Both he and Tryambaka knew a reality in which non-Brahmins observed ascetic celibate widowhood, though perhaps *sans* tonsure, even as this cannot be anchored in legal sources. Sturman notes that the widow marriage ban was brahmanical in custom, not endemic to other castes until artificially imposed in the nineteenth century, as codified contemporary usage began replacing ancient text as primary legal source, since the movers and shakers of the judiciary, seeking standardization, favored brahmanical praxis over myriad other local customs (Sturman 2010).

MAIMONIDES

Moses Maimonides was born in Cordoba in 1135. He was a rabbinic scholar, community leader, decisor, codifier, philosopher, theologian, and eminent physician. Maimonides was heir to a long line of religious judges. His legal codification, *Mishneh Torah,* was strictly formed, nearly devoid of personal opinion. His goal for the code was to provide practical legal guidance for the average fellow who could not distill a plan of action out of the ever-accumulating corpus of halakhic literature. His code was to be the last word. Some found this endeavor presumptuous, especially given his rarely citing sources, yet he was meticulous in his adherence to the law, as he believed it was stated. In cases lacking talmudic precedent, he qualified his statements with, "It appears to me."

Much like Vidyāsāgar, in his struggle against the widow marriage ban, as we shall see, Maimonides knew that his loyalty to tradition must be explicit. The right to issue creative independent judicial rulings is earned by showing faith in tradition, grasping the need to toe the line, to display the proper spirit of the law.

Where Maimonides does deviate from his meticulous precision in the *Mishneh Torah,* is in matters he deems superstitious. When spelling out talmudic laws pertaining to such practices he says:

> These and similar matters are lies and falsehood . . . not fitting for Jews, intelligent and wise, to be attracted by them or believe them effective . . . whosoever believes . . . that they are true, only that the Bible has forbidden them, belongs to the category of fools and ignoramuses . . . immature women and children. ("Laws Concerning Foreign Worship," 11:16)

Even as Maimonides does list the lethal wife taboo among the proscriptions within the section in his *Mishneh Torah* ("Laws Concerning Forbidden Intercourse," 21:31), dealing with illicit couplings, which would imply that this matter is one of law and not that of taboo, let alone, "superstition," in his practical casuistic dealings, he clearly sees no implementation-worthy legality in this matter (see Ben Menachem, 2006) and, even more so, is quick to dismiss any such concern as unworthy "superstition," *not* to be implemented. This distinction between *Mishneh Torah* categorization and his casuistic application in real time, as expressed in this aforementioned case, fits the spirit of his Responsa, in general. While his legal code records laws with a capital "L," his Responsa tout personal opinions as to how the Law should be applied to cases-at-hand. A jurisprude of integrity, Maimonides walked a tightrope—insisting upon ruling in favor of what he deemed correct and equitable, be the political backlash what it may.

VIDYĀSĀGAR

Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar—born in 1820 to a poor *Brahman* family in rural Bengal—was heir to a long line of Sanskrit scholars. His family having moved to Calcutta, he was educated and trained as judge and pundit at the new British Sanskrit college. He was "loved and admired for his quick intellect . . . won numerous prizes in philosophy, poetry, and Sanskrit composition . . . [ultimately] awarded the honorary title "Vidyāsāgar" meaning "ocean of learning." While not "uncommon for a *pandit*," his title would soon "call to mind but one man" (Hatcher 2012, 1–7). "Proud of his Brahman heritage and moved by dreams of improvement, Vidyāsāgar, like Rammohan Roy,"[23]

who worked to outlaw *satī*, harnessed "the resources of Sanskrit tradition to the task of social reform," opposing "deeply held customs," such as "child marriage and high-caste polygamy, while advocating for Hindu widow remarriage (*vidhava-vivaha*) . . . for which he is best known" (Hatcher 2014a).

Vidyāsāgar's "commitment to education and social change" connected him to other key activists for "social and religious reform." The newspaper, *Tattvabodhini Patrika* was his medium, in which, in January 1855, "he first published a short essay in support of widow marriage," earning him "instant notoriety." The very idea that "one of Bengal's most widely known Sanskrit intellectuals" would utilize his scholarly mastery of the authoritative treatises to buck contemporary Orthodox praxis, and prove how "widow marriage conformed to the dictates of sacred duty" sent shockwaves through the ranks of his "fellow *pundits*," who knew just how formidable his blend of Sanskrit scholarship with "enormous literary and rhetorical skills" was. They fought back in a of myriad monographs and treatises—none approaching his "level of social vision," says Hatcher, none matching his "meticulous scholarship," none equal to his "humanitarian empathy," which had "his admirers liken this *ocean of learning* . . . to an *ocean of mercy*" (Hatcher 2012, 1–7).

Consider his unique position. Given his background, knowledge, and attained social standing, Vidyāsāgar might well have fallen into sated complacency. He did not. Risking his high social position, he challenged its mores—for example, child marriage to older men, ascetic celibate widowhood even for young girls—in the name of moral rectitude.

His skill set too was unique. His rigorous Śāstric knowledge bolstered his reform-bent moral conviction and rhetoric, as he trumped fellow Orthodox pundits using shared hermeneutics. Much like twelfth-century Maimonides, Vidyāsāgar knew that if his loyalty to tradition were questioned, he and his views would have no sway. Even despite his indisputable scholarship, he was raked over the coals. Yet he prevailed. By the end of 1855, his *Hindu Widow Marriage* was the eye of a storm. Pundits were enlisted to refute him, as upper-crust Calcutta felt threatened. Ascetic widowhood was the norm in high-caste Bengali circles, as was polygamy. Older men might have several "young wives, since a particularly eligible Brahman groom, no matter his age, was thought to bring distinction to a bride's family [thus] child widowhood" too was prevalent. Yet, "by the middle of the nineteenth century, the combined forces of English education, Christian missionary polemics, government intervention, and Hindu reform" combined so that "the plight of the child widow garnered considerable public attention," until "July 26th, 1856," when "widow marriage was . . . sanctioned by . . . Act XV.13," yielding "the first marriage, organized by *Vidyāsāgar* and his colleague" on December 7, 1856. "Nearly eight hundred" attended, including "numerous pundits who supported the change" (Hatcher 2012, 1–7). His campaign was no mere lip

service. Vidyāsāgar's only son, Narayan, married a widow (Hatcher 2012, 7). His scholarly polemic included the following arguments, some which we have already seen: local custom may not trump authoritative treatises; the widow marriage taboo is caste specific; authoritative proof texts *do* exist as precedent for widow marriage; apt practice is eon specific as ages decline in virtue—ours being the fourth, the last: "Kali."

The storm of refutations with which Vidyāsāgar's *Hindu Widow Marriage* was met, included reactions, both scholarly and less so, some substantive, some ad hominem. "Had he known this is how ignorant people argued," he said of a particularly nasty detractor, "I am sure this eminent and respected gentleman—a man whom all agree is among the most learned—would never have done so" (Hatcher 2012, 73). As we delve into the Responsum of Maimonides later on, we will find resonance in his charges of ignorance against those treating the widow marriage taboo, aka *Katlanit,* with gravitas.

Vidyāsāgar structures his second book—his rebuttal—around the claims of his detractors. As we dive into some of the key sources, which he used in response to his opposition, we will articulate some of the claims to which he responds in depth. In the following passages, we are introduced to the *Parāśara smṛti*, a legal source dated later and of lesser prominence than the widely acclaimed *Manu smṛti*,[24] who serves as an important anchor in Vidyāsāgar's polemic, as the correct guide of Dharma for the Kali yuga—the eon in which we now live.

"The woman who does not bathe at the end of her period before serving her husband," says Parāśara, "goes to the netherworld after death *and is widowed again and again* . . ." In two more examples, Parāśara says of "[a] man who abandons a wife who is neither evil nor outcast," that he "will be born seven times as a woman *and will experience widowhood again and again*," and that "after death, the woman who neglected her husband because he was poor, sickly, or foolish is born as a snake *and is widowed again and again*" (Hatcher 2012, 123). This seems to imply that the poor soul who marries this inauspicious person—repeatedly widowed—is destined to die.[25] This would serve as quite the deterrent from marrying a widow and is, thus, argued Vidyāsāgar's opponents, a proof-text that widow marriage is not allowed. And yet, the very premise of these verses is *repeated widowhood*. As such, per Vidyāsāgar, they support widow marriage. "If there were no injunction regarding the remarriage of widows, how could it be possible . . . to become a widow '*again and again*?'" (Hatcher 2012, 123). Since these passages stand on the reality or possibility of repeated widowhood, they serve Vidyāsāgar well, as proof that widow marriage was and is indeed allowed.

This is but one example of how Vidyāsāgar rebutted his fellow Orthodox pundits in traditional hermeneutic argument, outdoing scholars who opposed widow marriage, in their very jurisprudential arena. From here we move on

to the next example, to a passage that goes further, providing opportunities quite distinct from ascetic widowhood, for one no longer in union with her husband. "The authoritative treatises," says Nārada, "prescribe remarriage of a woman if her husband is missing, deceased, is determined to be impotent, has become a renunciant, or has been outcast." This is striking, since it seems to reference options for divorce, not necessarily what we would refer to as widowhood, per se. Nārada continues, "If her husband is missing, a Brahman woman should wait for eight years; if she has no offspring, she may marry after waiting four years. A Kshatriya woman should wait six years; if she has no offspring, three years. A Vaiśya woman, if she has offspring, four years—if not, two. There is no calculation of time to wait for a Śudra woman." These specific calculations too are noteworthy, especially the latter statement regarding the Śudra, which gestures toward the absurdity of the praxis in colonial times, whereby customs pertaining to different castes were being adopted by all, however harsh. "If he is missing, but one has heard he is still alive," Nārada continues, "then one should wait twice as long as previously stated. If one receives no news, the previous rules for time apply" (Nārada 12.97–101, in Hatcher, 2012).

While Vidyāsāgar provides this text as an anchor for widow marriage, a Jewish religio-legal lens upon this material notes leniencies that Jewish law does not even consider, when trying to help *agunot,* "chained women," deprived of divorce writ, due to husband's recalcitrance or having gone missing, no matter how long. Jewish law does not release a woman *sans* proof or at least very strong presumption that he is dead. As to Vidyāsāgar's argument within his own systemic premises, if a woman whose husband went missing can remarry, how much more so should a confirmed widow be free to remarry.

Our next example involves the *yuga* theory, which is the basis of a key argument made by Vidyāsāgar. It goes as follows: each of the four *yugas*—cosmological eons in order of declining virtue, ours being the fourth, the last: "Kali"—has its own dharmic bidding, as articulated in specific collations, each designated for a corresponding *yuga*. As far as many of Vidyāsāgar's opponents were concerned, injunctions and prohibitions carried weight in all yugas, albeit, perhaps, to varying degrees in some cases. Vidyāsāgar argued that widow marriage was indeed enjoined, specifically for the Kali yuga. "Everyone knows that a special injunction or prohibition takes precedence over a general injunction or prohibition," he began, referring to the Kali yuga as the special case. He suggested collating "all the injunctions or prohibitions" as to widow marriage "in the authoritative treatises that explicitly mention the *Kali yuga*" so as "to determine whether the marriage of widowed women is enjoined or prohibited during the *Kali yuga*." Following this track, he shows no proscription of widow marriage in Manu or other sages. Per *Paraśara*, he

says, "during the *Kali yuga* such a woman and such a son are not reckoned to be *punarbhū* and *paunarbhava*, respectively," seeming to imply normativity of such scenarios. In fact, "we can find ample proof in popular practice today that such a woman is not reckoned a *punarbhū*, likewise, today such a son is not reckoned a *paunarbhava*," but "a Natural son."

And finally, in an example that clearly resonates with the contours articulated in our talmudic lethal wife case, "If the groom dies after betrothal but before the rites of marriage have been performed, or if for some reason the relationship is terminated, then that virgin can again be given in marriage to another groom." In careful distinction, he notes that "in another *yuga* this sort of married virgin and her son would be called a *punarbhū* and *paunarbhava*, respectively" (Vidyāsāgar, translated in Hatcher 2012, 106), marking them as categorically problematic. In the *Kali yuga,* then, widow marriage should not only be acceptable, rather than frowned upon by Orthodox pandits, but so common, that terms for married widows and their offspring should no longer be in use. By distinguishing dharma for each eon, and linking specific *smṛtis* with each, Vidyāsāgar was able to refute the claim of problematic contradiction between two verses—in Manu and in Paraśara.

While the scope of a chapter allows but a sampling of the debate between Vidyāsāgar and his scholarly rivals, what becomes clear is that his rigorous scholarly argumentation bolstered his call for reform, and had him treated, though at times begrudgingly, with *gravitas*. His were times of momentous change, not least in things religious (Hatcher 2014b, xi). His widow marriage act was legislated as State law, though local praxis was slow to follow suit. Traditional evolution takes delicate ebb and flow of custom and canon, each eyeing the other warily, even as dynamics vary from one tradition to another, one culture to another, one age to another, as change occurs top down, street up, and usually from a hybrid of the two.

VILE CUSTOM—*KUSAṂSKĀRA* AND *MAKRŪH*—THE STAKES

In his approach to the widow marriage taboo, Maimonides speaks in terms of a tri-part distinction in prohibitions: scriptural, rabbinic, and *makrūh*, or vile custom—dismissing the "lethal wife" ban as the latter, much as Vidyāsāgar, whose Hindu triad of bans includes scripture, tradition, and *kusaṃskāra,* dismisses the widow marriage ban as the latter.

What follows are two Maimonidean responsa—epistolary queries to, and responses from, religio-legal decisors, many of which are on record from medieval times to this day. Regarding the matter of "lethal wife," Maimonides is asked:

> As to Reuben, who took Leah, a widow, for a wife, and died without children . . . who had but one brother . . . on whom (Leah) fell as *yevama,* meant to redeem (Reuben's lineage) through *yibum,* levirate marriage, or *chalitza*, ritual release therefrom, and he (the brother) sought to fulfill his duty, but she refused. (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

To clarify: Leah, the childless widow in this case, is both refusing levirate marriage to her deceased husband's brother, as well as refusing to participate in the ritual, which would release the brother from his obligation. By refusing to comply, she is deemed "rebellious," and therefore deprived of monetary recompense. The questioner continues:

> We are split on this case. One side says: Even as I believe that every *yevama* who rebels against her duty should be dubbed *rebellious wife* and forfeit both dowry and marital contract worth, in *this* case she should *not* lose her assets, since *the law itself* prevents her from complying, as the rabbis say (of those widowed twice), "She shall not marry a third,"[26] leaving *us preventing her* from union with the brother. (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

Namely, irrespective of whether or not the woman is willing to comply with the scriptural injunction of levirate marriage, or its ritual release by *chalitza,* the matter of "lethal wife," which the inquirer calls "law," is in itself a barrier, making her resistance irrelevant:

> This stance is based on an earlier rabbinic ruling, stating that a woman dubbed "lethal wife," who falls to a brother for *yibum,* will not be redeemed. As early rabbis said: "She married the first, and he died, the second, and he died, she must not marry a third, given her risk to men she marries . . ."[27] This concern trumps even circumcision . . . as per the rabbis: "She circumcised her first son, and he died, her second, and he died, she must not circumcise the third," even as failure to circumcise is punishable by *karet* (early death). How much more so, risk of lethal wife must trump *yibum,* which can be ritually set aside by *chalitza*." On this basis, the brother, seeking fulfillment of his *yibum* duty, should release her with *chalitza* and grant her monetary recompense, even if she changed her mind and agreed to Levirate marriage. (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

Since the "lethal wife" was talmudically declared a risk to men she marries, seemingly akin to risk associated with the third brother of two babies who died as a result of circumcision, and given the existence of a "safer" option for the man—*chalitza*—her resistance is irrelevant and she deserves monetary recompense:

> Opinion two says: No matter if she is dubbed "lethal wife." By refusing *yibum,* she is rebellious, since heavenly decree links her to the brother, given her duty to the deceased. Her volition is irrelevant to this duty. She will *never be a free agent* until he releases her by *chalitza*, or she dies. The law regarding most "lethal wives," banning their marriage, is not the same as that applied to *yevama* before *chalitzah* sets aside the duty of *yibum*, which is a stronger injunction. May our esteemed teacher tell us his stance on this specific *yevama* case, as she rebelled against *yibum*? Is she rebellious? What does she deserve? Is her status as one who rebels against her husband? Is a "lethal wife" in such a case treated differently? Should she lose her assets? Is *chalitza* preferable in this case? Will she thereby lose her assets? And by the way, is *chalitza* always preferable nowadays? Do inform us, esteemed teacher, and may your heavenly reward be doubled. (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

This particular case shines a light upon the religio-legal stakes inherent in the competing oughts created by overemphasis upon "lethal wife" as law, rather than taboo. The matter of "levirate marriage"—"whereby the widow of a man who has died without children falls to his brother, from whom she must bear seed to perpetuate her diseased husband's lineage"—falls under the category of scriptural law, which, as we have seen, trumps custom and, most assuredly taboo. *Pikuach nefesh,* risk to life and limb, however, trumps nearly all law, scriptural as well. This particular test case, whereby the scriptural injunction of levirate marriage faces off against the "lethal wife" taboo, serves to delineate the parameters and nature of the latter. If the twice- or thrice-widowed is truly lethal, then, as risk to life and limb, she may not be married, even for fulfillment of scriptural law. If she is feared, merely due to superstition, and does not constitute any real danger, then scriptural injunction most certainly prevails.

We turn now to Maimonides's response to this query, in which both questioners—irrespective of their opinion regarding a "rebellious wife," who resists submission to levirate marriage—took for granted that the "lethal wife" was indeed "lethal," or at the very least, posed some level of risk to life and limb:

> I am greatly astonished by cherished Torah scholars, ever diligent in their studies, who nonetheless have doubts about such levels of bans, to the point where they cannot seem to distinguish between Torah law bans, rabbinic bans, and behaviors that are frowned upon or considered repugnant (*makrūh*), though not any type of legal ban. And all the more astonishing in your question, is your comparison between concern for true risk to life, which clearly trumps circumcision, and vague concern, the stuff of speculation, imagination, witchcraft, and superstition, which may, and only rarely, impress men of weak constitution. (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

We can well understand Maimonides's frustration. A prominent physician in his day, he was surely angered by attempts to equate likely risk from circumcision to hemophiliac babies with unlikely risk to men who marry "inauspicious" women. And yet, as a physician, he also knew of men with weak constitutions, physically affected by anxiety provoking situations.

Ironically, or not so ironically, the true risk was to life and limb of these women, frivolously dubbed "lethal," and thus left struggling for sustenance, oft with children. Says Maimonides:

> It is our opinion that marriage to such a woman, *presumed* repugnant, constitutes no real ban at all, and that there is no difference between a man marrying such a woman and one eating from vegetables clustered by a gardener (deemed unlucky by witches), and such. The practical law . . . in all the lands of Andalus is ever that if a woman loses husband after husband, several husbands, she is not prevented from marrying, and especially those in their youth, due to concern for great loss in such cases. We have already seen talmudic rabbis permit such transgressions, thus freeing women to marry, until all stumbling blocks to lasciviousness were removed. How can we possibly risk daughters of Israel falling to paths of ill repute? (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

Maimonides spells out the very competing oughts that Vidyāsāgar articulates in his polemic against the widow marriage ban, qua taboo—oughts, whose very opposition as equal contesters, is absurd—which, though mere practice, and at first, only of certain classes and locales, led to societal ills and gross transgressions, far more significant than violation of questionable custom. If we speak in terms of life and limb again, in terms of real risk, then it is these women, not the men, who are at risk if we ban them from marrying—risk physical and risk religio-legal, as they may well fall to prostitution, thus violating *real* law. In Andalus, says Maimonides, such bans were *not* customary, certainly not in the case of *young* widows.

Hanina Ben Menachem points out that despite Maimonides's opposition to and even derision, in his responsa, of those who act on the "lethal wife" taboo, he did include this talmudic ban in his legal treatise, *Mishneh Torah* ("Laws Concerning Forbidden Intercourse," 21:31). His explanation for this apparent contradiction in Maimonides is that he distinguishes between law with a capital "L" and law-to-be-applied. While including the "lethal wife" ban in his legal collation, as law with a capital "L," due to its talmudic canonical citation, he fiercely opposes its being applied on the ground, as seen in his response (Ben Menachem 2006, 41–42). "Here," says Ben Menachem, "law-to-be-applied" constitutes "general norm that diverges from the Law" with a capital "L" "applied in the responsum to a concrete case," as per needs and circumstances of specific case—no two alike. Ben Menachem explains

Maimonides's motivation: "The *Talmud* is very explicit on this issue" of the lethal wife:

> And he apparently felt that he could not ignore its ruling. The distinction between Law and law-to-be-applied [grants] a mechanism that enables him to achieve both interests: preservation of the talmudic ruling by its inclusion in the Law, and [an] implementation . . . that is fair to the "lethal" wife. (Ben Menachem 2006, 41–42)

This is a critical reminder that a judge/religious decisor must ever be on his toes, ready to discern how the Law may be applied in each new case. Were he to rest on his laurels, whether in study of Law, or in finger-on-the-pulse scrutiny of society, as it restlessly shifts about him, justice will not be served, despite application of Law to the letter. This may explain the reticence of rabbinic judges to issue rulings unless they must (Jany 2012, 203).

What follows is what we might call, Maimonides's "shock-of-conscience remedy—a plan by which such a woman, stuck in this predicament, can circumvent the unavoidable bureaucratic trappings of the system, which is thwarted at times—in certain cases by its very infrastructure—from delivering on its very spirit:

> What the scrupulous among us do, so as to avoid sanctifying a presumed lethal wife in marriage, is tell her explicitly: "If you find someone to sanctify you in marriage, we will not force him to divorce you, but this matter depends on you." Thus, widow and her groom-to-be circumvent the system by sanctifying their marriage before any two witnesses, after which she comes to the rabbinic court, the judges write her marital contract, she goes under the wedding canopy, and the court blesses her with seven blessings, since she was indeed sanctified in marriage. And in fact, this was the practice of *Ba'al HaHalachot* and the court of *Rabbeinu Yosef Halevi* and his students, and was the practice of all who followed their way. Thus we decreed and thus have we done in Egypt since we got here. All this we do for women, even when there is no injunction, such as *yevama*. (Maimonides, Responsum 218, translation by author)

When Maimonides speaks of the "scrupulous among us," he intends no compliment. By this term, he refers to those who disagree with his dismissal of "lethal wife" as mere superstitious taboo. His advice to such a widow is intended to help her deal with such decisors in such courts. He is offering her guidance as to how to circumvent the system when faced with such types. And in order to assure that he himself not seem rebellious or system-threatening, he brings precedence for this guidance from other sources, with whom he oft disagrees.

In the following case sent to Maimonides, we have no scriptural injunction of levirate marriage to contend with. What we have, however, is a strong example of what is at stake when the "lethal wife" *taboo* is applied as *law*. While reading this case, keep the stakes in mind. Ask yourself whose life and limb is truly at risk:

> A woman married a man and lived with him for a long time. He died, leaving behind a male child, who then died. She married another man and lived with him for years, never seeing good from him. . . . She sought witnesses to help redeem her from this marriage in exchange for her dowry and marital worth. . . . When her husband heard this, and that she sought a divorce, he ran off. Having reached Rav Alphasi, he fell ill and died. (Maimonides, Responsum 15, translation by author)

Point of clarification: Given that the man never gave her a writ of divorce—now that he is dead, we presume that her status is that of a widow:

> Meanwhile, he owned land with much debt. Debtors came collecting, only to find that the widow already redeemed herself from the marriage in exchange for relinquishing the land. The court decreed that the land be sold and the debts be taken from the sale price. Said the woman to the court: Since my husband never wrote me a divorce writ . . . I want my estate back. I relinquished my rights . . . in exchange for a divorce writ and never got one. Said the court: Having already relinquished the estate for your freedom, you get nothing. This matter remains hanging. The debtors took all owed. The family of the deceased took the rest. The widow was left penniless. (Maimonides, Responsum 15, translation by author)

This woman is caught in limbo. Having sold her land for a divorce she never received, the court left her penniless—and since she obtained no writ of divorce before her husband died, her status is that of a widow, and not just *any* widow, but one *twice*-widowed, leaving her both penniless *and* barred from marriage as a "lethal wife":

> Along came a man who wished to wed her. She sought council. The court barred her from marriage, saying: "You are a lethal wife, since two husbands died with you . . ." [She] has been left in dire straits. These difficult days of famine leave her nothing to pluck from the land . . . to make a living, nor can she marry a provider. . . . May this woman marry, since she redeemed herself from marriage before the man died? This case is grave. It will fall from our hands to the civil court. It is imperative that you . . . find a way to rectify the situation as you see fit. Please also advise if her redemption transaction was valid, if she may demand her money from the debtors . . . (Maimonides, Responsum 15, translation by author)

A new matter is introduced here toward the end of the passage, which raises the stakes even further. There is a fear that this case, if not resolved, and quick, by the rabbinic courts, will fall into the hands of the civil courts. This is presented as a risk to avoid at all costs. Maimonides answers as follows:

> If one were to sanctify her in marriage before two witnesses, the marriage would be considered binding. Afterwards, she would have an official marital contract written out in our court and she would marry there. And it is worthy and appropriate to be lenient in these matters, and for the judge to publicly pretend he is not aware, since scrupulousness in this minor matter leads inevitably to matters of profound severity . . . (Maimonides, Responsum 15, translation by author)

Maimonides's answer in this case recalls two elements from the prior case involving levirate marriage. Firstly, we find a shorthand version of the legal remedy of circumvention as formerly described. Secondly, even after providing a technique for circumventing the systemic, while remaining loyal to it, in cases where one encounters an overly scrupulous court, Maimonides stresses, in what reads like a message to such scrupulous courts of decisors, that it is worthy and appropriate *not* to be scrupulous in such matters, lest such scrupulosity wind up yielding leniency in matters far more severe.

When relating to the so-called ban against widow marriage, both Maimonides and Vidyāsāgar speak, not in terms of law, whether prescriptive or proscriptive, but in terms of "vile custom," be it as to ban of widow marriage on behalf of such custom, or referring to such prevention itself as "vile custom"—*kusaṃskāra* to Vidyāsāgar, *makrūh* to Maimonides. The term, *makrūh,* which Maimonides uses in his Judeo-Arabic, can mean reprehensible, abominable, detestable, unseemly, and so on . . . but not illegal. So too, *kusaṃskāra,* in Sanskrit, connoting the inverse of *saṃskāra,* which means purity or holiness—and thus, defiled, unworthy, vile custom or behavior. Vidyāsāgar uses this term to describe the local customs that keep widows in ascetic suffering, counter to what is called for by both law and morality.

Vidyāsāgar seeks to appeal to two sets of people. On the one hand, he wishes to educate those who are not aware of the sources, or of the legal source hierarchy, according to which one is meant to act in accordance with dharma. On the other hand, he is also appealing to those who do know better, but lack the backbone to stand up for what is right, and against the tide of what is popular as local custom. "In former times, with only the authoritative treatises to guide you, you gave your consent to new customs when prior customs had changed. Now," he chides, with access, both to "the authoritative treatises" and to the knowledge that through adherence to them "you can rescue widows and open a path to removing countless terrible evils, how is it right for you to refuse to consent to the current proposal?" He called out

those who resisted this lifesaving plan, for fear that local custom is sinful to question, and those who, despite their awareness and agreement "in their hearts that the proposal should be promoted, do not have the courage to say so for fear they will be labeled opponents of local custom." Vidyāsāgar rails against the grip of local custom on its adherents, who are fettered in "unbearable chains of slavery," as he envisions its growing control, "crushing the authoritative treatises" beneath it (Hatcher 2012, 204).

Vidyāsāgar's rhetoric resembles that of Maimonides, as we saw in his responsa, as both caustically deride and lament those whose supposed pursuit of righteousness is flipped on its head, yielding morally inverted priorities in such cases of competing oughts. "You pierce the very heart of righteousness," he cries. "You paralyze knowledge of good and evil and block the path to discerning right from wrong. Through your might, the authoritative treatises themselves are reckoned . . . unauthoritative," the "unauthoritative is revered as authoritative; righteousness is reckoned . . . unrighteousness, and unrighteousness is revered as righteousness. Your disciples have forsaken all duties and have willfully promoted evil customs" (Vidyāsāgar, translated in Hatcher 2012, 205).

It is here that Vidyāsāgar uses the term *kusaṃskāra* for "evil custom." This term serves as a parallel to Maimonides's *makrūh.* The use of these terms by each of these scholar-reformers demonstrates their sharp awareness of, as well as the necessity of, articulating distinctions between legal bans and superstitious taboos, which, if implemented as law, leads to harm. "And yet," Vidyāsāgar bemoans, "they are everywhere counted among the virtuous . . . because of their commitment to preserving what is popular." However, "the truly virtuous . . . without fault, will not follow you. They refuse to protect what is popular and for this they are scorned as the worst of atheists, worst of the unrighteous, and the most blameworthy of all" (Vidyāsāgar, translated in Hatcher 2012, 205).

Vidyāsāgar closes with a personal lament. As a whistle-blower of sorts, as idealistic reformer, willing and eager to speak out in defense of right, he has consigned himself to a difficult life, as his opponents do not merely disagree with him, but are happy to shun those, such as himself, who vocalize their unpopular stance.

CONCLUSION

We oft encounter scholars who may not be reformers, reformers who may not be scholars, but twelfth-century Maimonides and nineteenth-century Vidyāsāgar embodied both and more. At the core of each scholar-reformer's objection to the widow marriage taboo was acute humanistic awareness of

the plight of these women, a deep empathic sense of stakes. For decisors to act out of ethical imperative: "Do no harm!," out of the "Pesaqratic Oath" (Gordon-Guedalia, 2013), they must grasp the nature of harm, potential, or extant—as much prerequisite for apt rulings as is overarching textual systemic knowledge. Both Moses Maimonides and Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar fit this bill, both shared grave concern for those made all the more vulnerable by systems that both men believed were ethical at their core, systems, which should be helping them, rather than leaving them unmarriable, *sans* means of support, at great risk of falling to moral and physical harm, due to supposed prohibition, which, as each maintains in his system-specific language, has dubious anchor in religious law, qua law, as opposed to taboo, *makrūh/kusaṃskāra*—superstition qua erroneous local custom.

Our parallel investigation of Jewish and Hindu law and lore pertaining to widow marriage showed an extant taboo in each tradition. Both share ritual need for pristine purity maintenance, manifest, among other restrictions, in barring the biblical high priest and brahmanical priests from marrying widows. However, scrutiny of each system proved that such scrupulosity in purity maintenance lost its necessity once the age of sacrifice had all but lapsed entirely. Much as both rubrics present similar legal source strata, both suffer evolutionary accumulated layers of attitudinal taboo, manifest as doffing of jurisprudential dictates in favor of agenda driven or simply ignorant adherence to harmful social norms. Found in both traditions as antidote, are scholars who challenged these taboos, using similar hermeneutic tools, rhetorical styles and arguments, such as authority of local custom or scripture as legal source, articulation of "vile customs" (*kusaṃskāra*/*makrūh*) that cause grave harm in the guise of sacred praxis, exposure of erroneous interpretations, dubious agenda, false piety or ignorance behind such taboos—to unravel law from taboo, weigh competing oughts: systemic preservation and shock-of-conscience remedy, spare the vulnerable from harm disguised as law.

NOTES

1. This chapter is part of a larger project on the topic of the widow marriage taboo in Jewish and Hindu tradition.

2. See Julia Leslie, trans. *The Perfect Wife*, by Tryambakayajvan, India: Penguin Books, 1989.

3. See Shoshana Razel Gordon Guedalia, "The Pesaqratic Oath: Good Faith Presumption in the Spirit of Religio-Legal Rulings." *Keren Journal* Vol. I (Summer 2013), pp. 85-97, for my discussion of what I believe is an implicit oath taken, or one which should be understood as having been taken, by religio-legal decisors when

they complete their training and accept the responsibility to issue rulings, referred to in Hebrew as "pesaq." Much as a doctor is bound by the Hippocratic Oath, so too, religio-legal decisors must see themselves as first and foremost having taken what I have named, the "Pesaqratic Oath"—the commitment to "do no harm."

4. Babylonian version.

5. A discussion on the topic of gender designation with regards to who may be counted among the "good men" in Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, and Canon law is part of a work in progress of mine, called "Practice of Good Men."

6. Talmud B. *Eiruvin* 14b.

7. Talmud B. *Pesachim*, p. 50–52, author trans.

8. Proverbs 1:8.

9. Leviticus 21:20.

10. See the details of the Yom Kippur ritual during which the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies, attached to a white string, or rope, so that the people can pull his body out, if God forbid, it turns red, in the *Siddur*—the Jewish prayer book.

11. *Parāśara,* 4.12, as quoted by *Vīdyāsāgar* and translated by Hatcher.

12. See Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda* and *Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture,* NY: State University of New York Press. 1996, p. 344, "The *Aitareya Āranyaka* states that a student should not recite the *Vedas* after he has eaten meat, seen blood or a dead body, committed an unlawful deed, had intercourse, or engaged in writing." And see also, Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 52.

13. Expanded upon in larger project.

14. Study with Francis X Clooney has yielded a wealth of legal material corroborating need for Brahmanical purity for rite performance. This study has yielded fascinating parallels between specific Jewish and Hindu laws and regulations governing purity and defilement *en general,* as I discuss in my comparisons to Leviticus.

15. Which I discuss further in another paper, as to the parallel of whether or not Jewish women must follow the custom of their husbands.

16. This becomes interesting in parallel with the responsum of Maimonides as to the lethal wife.

17. A prescription, among other far more severe ones, that becomes a lifelong imposition upon women once they are widowed, if they do not choose the path of *satī*, to be articulated at the end of the passage.

18. This too has parallel in Jewish custom, and is discussed further in my aforementioned comparative paper on the topic.

19. Ibid. *Mireshut ha'av lireshut haba'al*—the Jewish phrasing of such a "norm"—from the jurisdiction of the father to the jurisdiction of the husband.

20. Which I expand on elsewhere.

21. 172-174 Bremmer Van Den Bosch first mentioned in the Viṣṇu legal code (5th?) 7th c. AD (Olivelle 2010, 14)

22. See for example, this Midrash in Genesis Rabbah, quoted in Alina Semo Kofsky, "A Comparative Analysis of Women's Property Rights in Jewish Law and Anglo-American Law." *Journal of Law and Religion* Vol. 6, No. 2 (1988), p. 319: When God created Adam, He also created a wife for him out of the earth.

This first woman was Lilith. Adam and Lilith, however, did not make a happy couple. Because they were both of the same origin, she considered herself his equal and refused to obey him. They quarreled with one another until in a moment of rage, with the help of the ineffable name of God, which she uttered, she flew away from Adam and vanished into the air. Adam complained to God that the wife He had given him had deserted him. God sent three angels to bring her back. The angels found her in the Red Sea, in the very spot the Jews later passed in the Exodus from Egypt. The angels tried to make her return, threatening that if she would not, hundreds of demon children would die daily. Lilith preferred this punishment to returning to Adam. Again the angels threatened: they would drown her in the sea. She implored them to spare her, and in return she granted them a concession. She told them that her purpose in life was injuring babies. Until the eighth day, after their birth, she could injure boys; and girls until their twentieth day. But, she swore, whenever she would see the names of these three angels written in a home, she would keep away from child and mother, and would do no injury. The three angels released Lilith after she had taken that oath. And to this day, the names of these three angels are written on amulets and hung upon the walls of the room where a woman lies in childbed.

23. See *The English Works of Rammohan Roy,* Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri and co. 1901.
24. At least until its revival in the commentary of fourteenth-century Madhava.
25. An interesting parallel to this specific blame instance can be found in Jewish Liturgy, where it says that there are three things that bring about the death of a woman during childbirth, and one of them is serving her husband while not yet ritually pure.
26. See Talmud B. *Yevamot* 64b.
27. See Ibid.

Special note: "Gordon" is my paternal last name, bequeathed to me, along with a love of Talmud, of scholarship in general, and of those moments when the spark of the Divine reveals itself in any and every human being—in *just* those *moments* you may *least* expect—by my *Chavruta*, my lifelong *study* partner, my *father*, of blessed memory, Rabbi Dr. Menachem Mendel Leib Martin Lewis Gordon, whose acute sensitivity in life, in scholarship, and in rabbinic rulings, represented a *beautiful* humanism, which *encompassed* what some might call a type of *feminism* set *squarely* at the *center* of his *humanism*. It is to *him* that I *dedicate* my work "Lethal Wives and Impure Widows"—a *small taste* of which I shared with you in this chapter, featuring two religio-legal scholars who shared my father's spirit. May their spirits thrive.

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Part III

THEOLOGY

Chapter 8

The Guru and the Zaddik and the Testimony of the Holy Ones

Thomas A. Forsthoefel

All religious traditions reveal the signal importance of religious virtuosi, whether saints, sages, shamans, or monks. This chapter examines such phenomena in Hinduism and Judaism by focusing on the guru and zaddik, both of which have complex and differentiated meanings and development internal to their traditions. I will address such pluralistic sensibilities, but focus on developments in Hindu and Jewish mystical and spiritual traditions whereby the guru and zaddik in the end fundamentally express an arc of immanence with respect to the divine. This arc ultimately reveals a sacramental dimension in their roles as spiritual teachers; in such cases, the guru and zaddik effectively become sacraments themselves, that is, a visible sign of an invisible reality, namely, the presence of God. While the precise theological interpretation of that presence may be diverse, such teachers minimally become, for their respective communities, windows to an ultimate reality. This chapter will consider the structure, meaning, and scope of these roles in Hinduism and Judaism, identify points of convergence and divergence, and see, in each, the power of testimony expressed in the lives of the holy ones. Testimony, as a mechanism to produce knowledge, in these cases suggests that the examples of the guru and zaddik potentially demonstrate the existence of God in a manner far more potent than apodictic argument. My method in the main will be phenomenological, especially in that approach's primary virtues of meeting traditions on their own terms and evaluating the data as they present themselves historically and contextually. At the same time, a close ally to that method is a comparativist sensibility, one that I value when properly done and one that clearly serves as a primary inspiration of this book. The fruit of comparison across cultures, done well, is a richer understanding of what it means to be human and a richer stock of insights on human experience, including that which is expressed in religions, texts, and cultures.

THE GURU

The phenomenon of guru sees a considerable range of meaning and value in the history of Hinduism. At its most basic, the term "guru" simply means teacher. Thus, a skilled virtuoso of any discipline may be honored by such a title—one's dance teacher, *mṛdaṅgaṁ* teacher, or Sanskrit teacher are all, in contemporary India, typically designated as "guru."

However, most typically the term has been applied to specific kinds of religious functionaries—in Hinduism, but also other Indian traditions, such as Jainism and Sikhism—namely, those who are skilled in a particular wisdom and endowed with a direct experience of it, what we might identify, following William James, as knowledge by acquaintance, a superior cognitive achievement than mere "book" knowledge or knowledge by description. The key element here is the value of direct experience, a "felt" knowledge transcending discursive abstraction and profound owing to visceral immediacy. Indeed, one of the semantic valences of the term "guru" is "heavy"; in other words, the guru is a "weighty" character, a person of depth and substance. By extension, the guru's teaching may be taken, by disciples, to be substantive, profound. One of the classic and often cited renderings of the term "guru" is found in the Guru Gita, a text written perhaps between the sixth to eighth centuries CE and found in the Skanda Purāṇa. The etymology there stipulates that the term's two syllables taken together indicate that the guru is the one who banishes ("ru") darkness ("gu"). Hence, the guru illumines the benighted.

But, as with much phenomena in Hinduism as well as in most religions, we may note fluid notions of conceptual categories. That is, there is no single, univalent interpretative schema in the historical account of the guru phenomenon in India. Instead we see a certain "play" in the concept that ranges from denoting a skilled and esteemed religious teacher to a lucid manifestation of the divine. However, while semantically fluid, if something of an underlying continuity can be determined between these semantic ranges, it would engage some notion of immanence.

It is the notion of "immanence" that I wish to use as a heuristic to consider the guru and the zaddik. If we take "the sacred"—however it is construed—as perhaps the seminal touchstone in the world's religions, we see that some consideration of immanence typically follows. For, recalling Robert Ellwood's Eliadean model, the boundaries of the sacred and profane are not rigid barriers but permeable membranes, as it were, with the sacred manifesting variously in time and space, persons, objects, and texts; these all become "sacred" owing to their association with *the* Sacred (Ellwood and McGraw 2002, 4). "Religion," thus, is that complex phenomenon

that ostensibly encounters, makes available, and opens up to the sacred. Religion*s*, in virtue of some stipulated or assumed theory of immanence, therefore, become windows to the ultimate. Underscoring this with respect to Hinduism, Christopher Chapple notes that in India the conventional world occupies a continuous space with the spiritual world: "The continuity in the Indian worldview between spirit and nature allows for certain places and people to be seen as infused with divinity" (Chapple 2005, 17). While to be "infused with divinity" points to the furthest range of immanence (and is theologically and philosophically complicated), gurus in India and zaddiks in Eastern Europe have played singular roles in their traditions with respect to mediating and/or revealing divinity; embodying human excellence in the particular manner of their traditions, they become, most significantly and despite differing theological or philosophical anthropologies, windows to the ultimate and even a kind of "embodied argument" for the existence of God.

In Hinduism, we see differing understandings of the religious guru, ranging from the teacher of Brahmin boys following their initiation (*upanayana*) to the very presence of God himself. This range is captured by Daniel Gold in his assessment of the "elevated status" of the guru in Hinduism, that is, determining whether the guru is simply understood as an "exceptionally wise human being, a respected teacher of age-old traditions" or as an "instance of the embodied divine, somehow superhuman and distinct from ordinary mortals" (Gold 2005, 220). The former has strong historical roots in Vedic literature, particularly in the Upaniṣads, where the guru, as an enlightened sage, demonstrates in his person the union of theory and practice; and it is to this one that a student is enjoined to bring firewood in hand for spiritual training and development. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (1.2.12) indicates this: "Let him approach him properly, tranquil and at peace, his mind at rest, and then his wise guru will teach him the science of Brahman" (Dhavamony 1987, 155). In this case, the guru is "the personal teacher and spiritual preceptor who has himself gained spiritual knowledge and hence becomes the competent master to impart this knowledge to his disciple" (Dhavamony 1987, 155). The term "guru" here has associations with other terms denoting a legitimate capacity to teach, such as *ācarya* and *upādhyāya*. But while in the Upaniṣads and in later Vedānta, association with a teacher seems to be the *sine qua non* for spiritual progress, immanence here means something less than a direct, physical manifestation of God. Nevertheless, as one not only learned in the scriptures but also a "man of realization," the guru, effectively integrating theory and practice, becomes a lucid demonstration of human potential in the context of Vedic revelation; his testimony—in word and deed—becomes credible, much as that of an expert witness in a court, or an exquisitely skilled surgeon or mechanic. In this case, the guru bears witness, by his integrity and excellence, to an

ultimate reality—intimacy with which becomes the decisive meaning of one's existence. It is therefore worth considering—and even seeking.

Indeed, the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, a later (perhaps 200 BCE) and decidedly more theistic text, claims, "To the great-souled man who loyally and greatly loves his God, who loves his guru even as his God, the matter of this discourse will shine with clearest light, with clearest light will shine" (Dhavamony 1987, 156). We note that understanding—and "understanding" in the Upaniṣads is hardly didactic but salvific—obtains at least in part by devotion (paralleling the Bhagavad Gītā's own devotional emphasis), which includes loving the guru "even as his God." In this case, a subtle metaphysical distinction between God and guru remains, however much the guru is exalted. Again, immanence here seems to reflect something less than a fully developed sense of divine embodiment, but nonetheless retains a potent and catalytic texture. In this case, immanence, reflected in the guru's association with and internalization of the sacred, becomes a locus of transformation for the disciple.

The Vedic and Vedāntic traditions understood the power of spiritual pedagogy. Indeed, noting the premier method for transformation in the Vedānta—"hearing," "reflection," and "contemplation'—the first, "hearing," of course, presumes the instrumental role of a teacher. Various Vedāntic manuals—such as the *Atmabodha* and *Vedāntasāraḥ*[1]—emphasize the traditional importance of the guru, while the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, the only independent (i.e., non-commentarial) treatise on Advaita by the eighth-century philosopher Śaṅkara, details, in its prose section, various intellectual and moral prerequisites of the teacher and student and articulates various strategies to facilitate the student's realization. The text has been called also Śaṅkara's "singular exposition of the teaching art" (Cenker 1995, 33).

However, even exoteric texts such as *The Laws of Manu*, typically more concerned with constructing a social reality informed by dharmic principles than propounding methods of salvation, affirm the importance of the guru and the transformative potential in the guru-disciple relationship. *Manu* stipulates the importance of devotion as well, in this case to the students' parents and teacher. "By loving devotion to his mother, he wins the world; by loving devotion to his father, the middle world, and by obedience to his guru, the world of ultimate reality" (Doniger 1991, 41). Here, again, the guru—and filial devotion to him—becomes the catalyst to attain the highest good. Ainslie Embree once articulated a sweeping categorization of the term "guru" as one "who in all schools was esteemed as next or equal to God" (Embree 1988, 322). While the phrase "equal to God" is philosophically loaded—as the numerous debates in schools of Vedānta demonstrate—we might say, that in the Vedic tradition, the range of immanence often indicates something that falls short of full divine embodiment; the guru, by virtue of

his learning and realization, very much is "next to" God, that is, proximate to or intimate with the divine. Hence, just as a qualified student musician might seek out a virtuoso—identifying that adept's legitimacy on the basis of demonstrated excellence—and begin a process of internalizing that teacher's training with the potential of becoming a virtuoso himself or herself, so, in the guru-disciple pedagogy of the Vedic tradition, a student begins the process of transformation in and through association—and devotion—to the guru. The guru is "fire for the oblations to the gods," that is, a vehicle or instrument to attain the highest realm; hence, "serving the guru brings about the highest good" (Doniger 1991, 286).

The importance of devotion must not be overlooked, and, indeed, guru-*bhakti* sometimes is formally stipulated as a soteriological method, such as expressed in the Guru Gītā, and is also seen in regional traditions, such as the North Indian Sant tradition. But devotion and its object can also be complexified. While devotion in Indian *bhakti* traditions often implies worship of a transcendent being, devotion, even in colloquial parlance, need not imply such at all but instead simply indicate a loving selfless commitment or abandonment. Devotion suggests cathecting, by way of love or passion, to an object of concentration and commitment; it need not indicate worship or deification—though that certainly is the case in theistic devotional traditions. In short, devotion marshals a concentration of mind and a commitment of will to an object of focus, for example, a partner, child, profession, God, or . . . teacher. In guru-*bhakti* where immanence falls short of all-out divinity, devotion to the guru allows one, as Chapple notes, "to adopt the ultimate role model" (Chapple 2005, 31). Such adoption becomes an engine for transformation because "the guru symbolizes the best of all human possibility" (Chapple 2005, 31). Kirin Narayan also notes that a guru gives hope that "lives can change, that suffering has meaning, that spiritual illumination can actually be achieved" (Narayan 1989, 84). In this case, the guru "becomes an internalized touchstone of hope and goodness" (Narayan 1989, 84).

These construals of the guru as realized teacher or esteemed adept, credible in virtue of knowledge and experience, indicate immanence that may fall short of a fully developed sense of divine embodiment. But the arc of immanence that sees the esteemed teacher rising to the point of divinity gradually develops in Hinduism. Even in *Manu* we read, "The teacher is the physical form of ultimate reality" (Doniger 1991, 40). Here we see an apotheosis of the guru—the point where immanence attains the most complete expression of divinity. This is no better illustrated than in the Bhagavad Gītā, where Kṛṣṇa reveals himself both as divine incarnation and most venerable guru (11.43; Cenkner 1995, 26). And the Guru Gītā takes this further, at once exalting a metaphysic whereby the transcendent Śiva is understood as the supreme guru but also affirming the divine status of localized guru. On the

one hand, we see metaphysical linking of Guru and Supreme: "Apart from the Guru, there is no other Brahman," and "The Guru is not different from pure, unbounded consciousness, the Self" (v. 5; 9; Carrera 2014). And on the other hand, we see an anthropological or metaphysical linking of divinity and human teacher: the human guru is the "visible form of the Imperishable," and the supreme state can be attained by "whole-hearted worship of the Guru, who is Śiva, manifest in human form" (opening meditation; v. 21; Carrera 2014). The metaphysical identification of "Guru" and "Supreme" is seen variously since the sixth century through the contemporary era. For example, the Advaya Tāraka Upaniṣad similarly affirms both the cosmic and localized sense of the divine guru, "The guru alone is the supreme Absolute; the guru alone is the supreme way; the guru alone is the supreme knowledge; the guru alone is the supreme good . . . because he is a teacher of that (non-dual being) he is the guru greater than any other guru" (Dhavamony 1987, 158).

Ramana Maharshi, among the greatest twentieth-century exponents of non-dualism, held that "There is no difference between God, Guru, and Self," clearly affirming the metaphysical linking of guru and Absolute (Forsthoefel 2002, 143). Indeed, this linking ultimately reveals, at the relative plane of reality, a profoundly immanent or sacramental view. If reality is non-dual, then every phenomenal event reveals the divine presence. This notion is neatly captured in William Cenker's assessment of the Advaitin Śaṅkara: "A guru in Śaṅkara's estimation lives the non-duality of the self and Brahman, but for the sake of his disciples he teaches within a differentiated and dual world" (Cenkner 1995, 35).

The metaphysical linking of the Ultimate and Guru is affirmed by Swamiji, the subject of Kirin Narayan's ethnographic study, who concludes, finally, "The entire universe is the Guru. Wherever you tread, you should continue to find the Guru. Every second" (Narayan 1989, 86). While such an affirmation is striking, it points to an ultimate union of the divine and guru notions and underscores the signal importance of recognizing the divine presence at every moment and in every place. Interestingly, for our comparison to the zaddik, the Guru Gītā also affirms that veneration of the human guru generates material, as well as spiritual benefits: good health, long life, happiness, prosperity. An important development in eighteenth-century Hasidic thought is that the responsibility and commitment of the zaddik includes providing for the material, and not just spiritual, needs of his community.

To recapitulate, categories overlap between "teacher of Vedic knowledge," "esteemed teacher," and "divine embodiment." But, to be sure, the most exalted status is seen in the epithet "Gurudev," "guru as god" or "guru-divinity." This maximal status is clearly seen in the Guru Gītā, which unifies the ontological identification of the transcendent God-Guru, then expresses a fully embodied divine immanence in the human guru, adoration

to whom will facilitate liberation. This sensibility, perhaps the most intense expression of immanence, has carried through to contemporary Hinduism; such gurus in this case are "instances of the embodied divine, a being whose metaphysical status is qualitatively different from ours" (Gold 2005, 221). In late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century Hinduism, Satya Sai Baba and Rajneesh/Osho seem characteristic of such maximal notions of immanence, while Muktananda and his successor Chidvilasananda were also understood to able to "transmit something of their divine selves to qualified devotees," following a tradition of perfected beings (*siddha*s) (Gold 2005, 221).

Now, the abuse of guru-hood has been well-documented and points to a critical danger in imputing divinity—and therefore a qualitatively different metaphysical or anthropological status—to a living being, a problem which Daniel Gold, noting contemporary public guru scandals, modestly understates: "Strong assertions (of divinity) may go hand-in-hand with wide licence" (Gold 2005, 221). The metaphysical/anthropological stipulation, in this case, is sometimes enfolded in a psychological process, whereby one projects onto a guru one's deepest values and virtues, then psychologically identifies with the guru, thereby allowing one to share in the guru's goodness and greatness (Kakar 1982, 144). Problems may obtain in subverting one's agency by overly relying upon the guru, not to mention a guru's inability to bear inflated "transference"; concerning the latter, intoxication with adulation may lead to the abuse of power and genuine spiritual and psychological harm to disciples. While "crazy wisdom" traditions may constructively critique conventional moralities when they are rigid and oppressive and perhaps affirm some liberating potential in antinomian practice, the scope for self-delusion is wide indeed.

What is more interesting to me is the range of immanence that falls perhaps just short of a fully developed or complete identification with God. In this case, we see in Hinduism holy beings who, by their practice and experience, embody the fullest scope of human potential. Perhaps we may say that a profound and authentic humanity *is itself* divine. Human excellence, informed by the values, virtues, and resources of a tradition, becomes a mirror to the furthest reach of human potential, indeed to divinity itself. Ram Dass, a guru to many in the West, articulated this notion with respect to the guru in Hinduism, and, in my own study of holiness across cultures, I developed it as well (Chapple 2005, 26; Forsthoefel 2006).

THE ZADDIK

While the history and development of the guru phenomenon is complex in Hinduism, that of the zaddik in Judaism is no less so. As with the term "guru,"

the term "zaddik" also has a complicated semantic valence and is intimately associated with Eastern European Hasidism, itself a phenomenon endowed with a complicated history. The term "zaddik" comes from the Hebrew word "zedek," "justice," and by extension means "righteous" or "righteous one." The title has early historical associations with towering Biblical personalities, such as Moses and Elijah, and is found in Talmudic commentary on such saints. However, it is with Lurianic Kabbalah that we see a distinct turn in theological understanding of the term.

"Zaddik" there "symbolized the aspect of the Godhead (*sefira*) that discharged the flow of divine energy (*shefa*) to the lower worlds in order to sustain them . . ." (Etkes 1996, 165). The function of channeling that energy for the purposes of sustaining the world was one that later spiritual leaders of the Jewish communities were understood as obliged to fulfill. Those particular religious virtuosi in Eastern European Judaism, especially since the eighteenth century, were known as zaddikim, and the particular community of disciples surrounding them were known as Hasidim, a term which originally means "pious."

However, terminological shifts are to be noted. "Zaddik," meaning righteous or "righteous one," would therefore presumably be the aspiration of any pious faithful in Judaism. Understood "forensically," righteous here means innocent by the standards of heavenly judgment (Green 1977, 331). It assumed a virtuous state "acquired by proper behavior, especially conquest of the passions" (Green 1977, 331). So, commenting on the claim, "There is no zaddik but the son of a zaddik," Joseph Dan properly notes that it would be "absurd to suppose that there is no righteous person but the son of one" (Dan 2007, 97). Hence, the use here suggests a terminological change developing from the eighteenth century, one shifting from classic Kabbalistic doctrine and piety to developing socio-religious models of leadership. Similarly, while the term "hasid" also has earlier significations and application—for example, as far back as the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes (second century BCE) and the Ashkenazi Hasidim (twelfth to thirteenth century CE) (Ettinger 1991, 227)—the term takes on a different sensibility in the eighteenth century beginning with the rise of the charismatic leadership of Israel Baal Shem Tov ("the Besht"; c. 1700–1760) and his later disciples and is articulated by Rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, the "chief theoretician of institutionalized Zaddikism" (Rapoport-Albert 1979, 322). Rabbi Elimelekh is the first to insist on using the term "zaddik" to identify and express a rather specific socio-religious development within Hasidism. The terms "zaddik/zaddikim," appropriated from standard Hebrew designations, now represented a class of spiritual virtuosi to be distinguished from the masses. The zaddik becomes the charismatic spiritual leader who attracts disciples, now identified as "hasidim" (Etkes 1996, 165).

To continue setting context and development, most scholars seem to agree that Beshtian Hasidism was not a completely novel or original development, but has continuities with earlier expressions of Jewish piety. Before the rise of the Besht, Hasidism was a pietistic movement with messianic aspirations, but by the end of the eighteenth century it developed into loose networks of communities led by the zaddik. However, rather than being something radically revolutionary or original, Hasidism was a revivalist movement focused on the emerging zaddikkim: "The whole development centers round the personality of the Hasidic saint" (Scholem 1941, 344). A key in that development appears to be a critique of traditional learning in favor of direct, intense, immediate experience of the divine. In the appeal to direct, first-hand experience, we, of course, see parallels in the importance of a particular kind of "knowledge" exemplified by the realized teacher of the Vedas and Vedānta, repeated appeals to direct experience by any number of medieval bhakti traditions in India, and twentieth-century Hindu mystical programs. In the case of eighteenth-century Eastern European Judaism, Scholem offers this assessment whose core insight could be applied to any number of mystical methodologies in Hinduism and other religions: "Classical Hasidism was not the product of some theory or other, not even of Kabbalistic doctrine, but of direct, spontaneous religious experience" (Scholem 1941, 347). The emphasis on "direct religious experience"—a controverted concept in the academic study of mysticism—is a motif assumed in Upanishadic visions of realization and especially develops in Hindu bhakti traditions. Concerning the latter, Joel Mlecko notes, "Salvation centers not on textual authority or logical argument, but on experiences of founders and teachers who are exemplars of what others can achieve" (Mlecko 1982, 58). This experiential or existential dynamic is hardly limited to Hasidism or Hindu bhakti and guru traditions, and is found in other religious traditions. For example, various expressions of Buddhist practice aim to "see reality as it is," namely, a direct, immediate experience of reality uncolored by conceptual presuppositions.

Traditional Jewish piety would assume that direct intimacy or communion with God (*devekut*) is an aspiration and possibility open to all the faithful. However, in the development of the concept of the zaddik, an assumption emerges concerning the dubious potential of attaining that goal on the part of the masses—and therefore the subsequent need to turn to the spiritual luminary. The zaddik, the "true illuminate" and "center of the community" (Scholem 1941, 343), becomes an "*axis mundi*" (Green 1977, 327). However, while the zaddik's intimacy with and privileged access to God is assumed, the spiritual limitations of the faithful are likewise assumed. An irony thus emerges: while direct experience of the divine in part catalyzes the rise and development of "zaddikism," a two-tier system develops whereby the masses presumably are able only to access the divine indirectly, that is, through the

zaddik. This notion was particularly conceptualized by Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonoy, the principal documenter of the Besht's life and practice, as the dichotomy between "men of form" and "men of matter." Owing to the virtues of the former and the limitations of the latter, the zaddik becomes the intermediary between the Hasidim and God, endowed with the capacity and responsibility to support both the spiritual and material well-being of his disciples. However, at the level of spiritual pedagogy, he, like the authentic guru of Hinduism, not only becomes a source of grace and blessing, but also becomes an ultimate role model; his life "becomes proof of the possibility of living up to the ideal" (Scholem 1941, 343).

But the turn to the religious virtuoso as exemplar and intermediary developed, perhaps inevitably, some concerns over authority. For if, as Scholem registers, opinions become less important than character and mere learning no longer occupies the premier place of religious values (Scholem 1941, 344), then traditional models of leadership may be threatened indeed. As Scholem notes, "The personality of the Zaddik, its interpretation by the Hasidic writers, their insistence on his supreme religious authority, his elevation to the rank of a source of canonical inspiration, of a medium of revelation—all this fairly compelled a clash with the recognized religious authority of rabbinic Judaism" (Scholem 1941, 345). While this did happen—as indicated by the famous clash with Rabbi Eliyahu the Gaon of Vilna in 1762 and the ongoing disputes to this day with *mitnageddim* (opponents)—this seems to be an understandable, if not predictable, outcome of religious movements investing "direct" personal experience with an elevated, if not supreme, source of religious authority. For example, in the history of Islam, Muslim clerics were not infrequently threatened by Sufi orders whose system of power and authority tended to revolve around the sheikh rather than traditional *ulema*. And, of course, at least one contributing element to the Protestant Reformation was the rejection of papal magisterial control over biblical "meaning" in favor of a direct, personal encounter with divine inspiration universally available to the faithful.

But Hinduism and Judaism do not have a singular structure of authority as Roman Catholicism. Instead, in both traditions we see various localized and independent centers of religious expression in harmony with the deepest currents of the mainstream tradition, but nonetheless autonomous. Indeed, Kirin Narayan notes the premier importance of the guru in historical and regional transformations in Hinduism:

> The term "sect" is problematic when applied to the Hindu context, for sect as a Christian concept carries the implication of dissenting communities formed in opposition to the orthodox church. Yet while Brahmans can be viewed as the orthodoxy, they are neither organized into one church nor the sole locus of

> authority. Since there is no single overarching Hindu institutional structure to monitor faith, the gathering of people around a novel mode of belief or worship cannot be viewed as a sect based on heterodoxy. Instead, the central defining characteristic of a Hindu sect (*sampradāya*, *panth*) is that it is a tradition founded by a Guru. (Narayan 1989, 84)

There are relevant parallels to some Hasidic institutional structures, including a transmission of authority and the creation of spiritual lineages. In the case of Hasidism, upon the death of the zaddik, authority is transferred to the zaddik's son (or son-in-law), creating a spiritual dynasty and, among other things, effecting social cohesion. "Each dynastic house of *zaddikim*, of which there are scores, has a group of followers. These dynastic groups have been established now for seven or eight generations overcoming the dispersions and persecutions of eastern European Jewry" (Dan 2007, 98). This tight, dynastic structure seems subverted, however, in the Bratslav Hasidic community, as its founder Rabbi Nachman, the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, did not designate a successor upon his death. As Joseph Dan notes, the absence of strict institutional leadership structure in the Bratslav community remains a source of appeal to some secular Jews wanting to rejoin or deepen their faith but without the formal structure of dynastic houses (Dan 2007, 100).

We see, then, in both Hinduism and Hasidism (from the late eighteenth century), religious virtuosi—the guru and the zaddik—becoming potent spiritual authorities in relatively autonomous religious contexts, galvanizing and indeed shaping their respective communities. In both contexts, these spiritual leaders are exalted in virtue of their identification with the sacred. Owing to an implicit or explicit affirmation of immanence, they become, at the very least, windows to the ultimate, transparent, as it were, to the transcendent. They reveal, for their disciples, the presence of the divine in lucid ways.

Of course, the extent of range of immanence differs according to each context's deepest metaphysical sensibilities. As noted earlier, an important current in various expressions of Hinduism is that the guru is a divinity in human form, addressed as "Gurudev," or "Guru-God," and indeed even worshipped much as an icon in a temple (Narayan 1989, 82). This sensibility, however, is shaped and framed by a broader notion that the divine manifests itself in and through nature—rivers, mountains, hills, trees, fords—temple images, and persons. It therefore behooves one to behold or "take darśana" of the divine in and through these phenomenal expressions. As such, blessing obtains in the sensible contact with the sacred—whether through sight or touch (*prasāda*)[2]—that is, a transference of power (*śakti*), from the sacred to the subject occurs. Spiritual benefits thus issue through the physical channel or intermediary of holy person or object.

While standard Jewish caution against "idolatry" may establish limits to more radical theologies of immanence, the notion of the zaddik, while not fully consistent with the "gurudev" notion in Hinduism, nonetheless shares seminal patterns. Both are viewed as spiritual leaders endowed with a qualitatively different anthropological, if not metaphysical, status from that of ordinary persons. The zaddikim are "supermen" (Rapoport-Albert 1979), intermediaries between the sacred and the profane who ascend to the highest realms and then descend to their communities to bring spiritual and material blessings. At the very least, the zaddik was viewed as a "superior figure who chose to bind his lot with that of others by a willful act of generosity" (Green 1979, 15), a characterization that recalls not only the guru in Hinduism but the bodhisattva ideal in Mahayana Buddhism. Here, the zaddik is a channel through which divine abundance flows; he is a ladder by whom others may ascend to God (Green 1977, 338).

While a "superman" may not be God, the full range or potential of immanence in "zaddikism" should not be underestimated. Indeed, Scholem interprets the work of Solomon Schechter, who, in Scholem's view, "defined the doctrine of God's immanence in all things not only as the very root of and core of Hasidism, but as its distinguishing characteristic" (Scholem 1941, 347). According to Scholem, some Hasidic thinkers felt that Luria misunderstood the notion of "divine contraction" (*tzimtzum*), arriving at a false idea of God's absolute transcendence. Instead, "A ray of God's essence is present and perceptible everywhere and at every moment" (Scholem 1941, 348). Joseph Dan prefers the term "panentheism" as the most appropriate descriptor of Hasidic notions of immanence. "Panentheism"—the belief that "all is in God'—appears to retain a metaphysical distinction between the sacred and profane, while nonetheless affirming a strong doctrine of immanence. Hence, if the claim that "there is no place from which He is absent" (Dan 2007, 97) is true, then every element of phenomenal reality—much like non-dualistic notions in Hinduism—has the potential to disclose the divine; however, owing to his sanctity and qualitatively distinct spiritual status—"utterly different in essence" from "vulgar masses" (Rapoport-Albert 1979, 304, 306)—the zaddik becomes a unique and special locus of the divine. Belonging to a "superior anthropological category" (Rapoport-Albert 1979, 311) in virtue of his intimacy with God (*devekut*), the zaddik, not unlike some gurus, was said to be endowed with "pneumatic powers" able to work miracles on behalf of disciples. For the Besht, these powers obtained through meditative contemplation of Hebrew letters (hence, "master of the good name," i.e., "Baal Shem Tov"). "There is no doubt that such powers were thought to be supernatural" (Rapaport-Albert 1979, 309).

Given strong immanent sensibilities, particularly as applied to the zaddik, it would appear that its theoreticians risked the charge of blasphemy. But,

as Ada Rapoport-Albert notes, Rabbi Elimelech and others who felt that the zaddik was the real focus of religious life, "bordered on blasphemy without ever quite falling into it. The Zaddik was never deified; he never became the object of worship in his own right" (Rapoport-Albert 1979, 322). Jonathan Garb, however, does make the controversial case, not unpersuasively, that earlier pre-Beshtian Kabbalistic fraternities in Safed not only regarded spiritual leaders as saints but that they were objects of worship as well (Garb 2008, 207).

While not unambiguous, we see a continuum in the arc of immanence. On the one hand, we see its furthest reach with respect to the guru in Hinduism and its fluid limits vis-à-vis the zaddik in Hasidism. While qualitatively distinct metaphysical or anthropological statuses are affirmed for both, the range of immanence appears more fully developed in certain expressions of the guru phenomenon in Hinduism: the guru is embodied divinity. While perhaps considered a "superman," the zaddik approaches or perhaps closely "parallels" God (Rapoport-Albert 1979, 321), but is not typically considered a divine embodiment in the manner of some guru representations.

But there remain striking parallels in any case. One notion revealing at once the superior power of the zaddik and the obligation of his disciples is that of "adhering" or "cleaving." While ostensibly the goal of divine communion (*devekut*) would apply to all, as we have seen the assumption emerging in Hasidism by the end of the eighteenth century was that masses were in effect incapable of such and instead were enjoined to adhere or to cleave to the zaddik. By such identification—facilitated by the practice of contemplating the face of the zaddik in prayer—we again see strong parallels to guru phenomena in Hinduism. Indeed, an ancient formula the guru used to admit his students following the *upanayana* ceremony is striking in this regard: "Your heart shall dwell in my heart; my mind shall follow your mind; my word you shall rejoice in with all your heart; to me alone you shall adhere; in me your thought shall dwell; upon me you veneration shall bend; when I speak you shall be silent" (Cenkner 1995, 17).

Such cleaving, adhering, fusing, and identifying with a spiritual figure—whether celestial or human—are spiritual methodologies common to Hindu and Buddhist Tantra as well as eighteenth-century zaddik and contemporary guru phenomena (Narayan 1989, 82–84). While psychological interpretations of such methodologies may reveal potential problems in such methods—dependence and projection, for example—less severe assessments may simply indicate the potential for internalizing the example of a holy person. If the guru, recalling Narayan, "symbolizes the best of all human possibility" then by adopting his or her example one may grow, much as one may grow by following the example of mentors in other areas of life.

Other shared approaches can be seen including that of the spiritual paternity of the guru or zaddik. Both have been viewed as a spiritual progenitor or "father." In the *Laws of Manu*, we read, "They call the teacher the father, because he gives the Veda . . ." (Doniger 1991, 35). A striking parallel concerning such spiritual paternity obtains between early Vedic and pre-Beshtian understandings of the guru and the zaddik. On the one hand, the Vedic guru spiritually "impregnates" the disciple with his spirit, "and delivers him into a new birth" (Cenkner 1995, 6). A ritual text further develops this thought: "The teacher lays his right hand on the head of the pupil whereby he becomes pregnant with him (*tena garbhi bhavati*) and then in the third night the embryo issues out of the teacher and (the pupil) being taught the Savitrī obtains true Brahman-hood" (Cenkner 1995, 6).

In a parallel that likewise affirms the paternal, sexual, spiritual potency of the Hasidic virtuosi, Luria's teacher R. David Ibn Abi Zimr'a described a "technique of concentrating the heart on the teacher in order to effect an impregnation of the disciple's soul by the teacher during both their lifetimes" (Garb 2008, 209). "And it is also possible that he will adhere (*yitdabek*) to you and impregnate you permanently in order to benefit you and assist you with Torah [study] and [performance of] commandments" (Garb 2008, 214–215). An ideal of mystical communion between teacher and student appears in later zaddikim and, of course, is strongly featured in various guru expressions in India. Operative assumptions in this regard in both traditions is that the spiritual figure—who himself can become a focus of contemplation—understood either as the divine presence himself or a channel of the divine—has the power to effect constructive spiritual and material good on behalf of the disciple, including the canceling, in Hasidism, divine judgment, converting it to mercy (Rapoport-Albert 1979, 322).

But one might ask that if the zaddik has the power to cancel divine judgment, is he not at least on par with the divine? At the very least, we do see a "quasi" messianic ideal in later zaddikism. But the zaddik's influence, Joseph Dan notes, is not universal but limited in time and place, redeeming only his own community in his own lifetime (Dan 2005, 3790); Hasidism thus "neutralized" the messianic drive in Judaism and instead "established the *zaddik* as an everyday redeemer and savior" (Dan 2007, 99). While perhaps not God, the zaddik, in and through his intimacy with God, clearly becomes a potent source of spiritual—and material—benefit.

What can we conclude from our examination? First, there are numerous clear parallels in the guru-zaddik phenomena that involve semantic complexities of each term, historical developments that indicate increasingly elevated statuses of each, and the sociological significance of each model of leadership. While I have addressed aspects of those considerations above, there are other parallels that I can do no more than point to right now—such the

expectation of complete obedience in both systems, further consideration of authority transmissions in guru lineages and zaddik dynasties, and the notion of "choosing" one particular guru or zaddik over another. Instead, I would like to return to the theological notion of immanence as perhaps the most significant parallel comparison. All religious traditions operate with some arc of immanence. The sacred, while perhaps "transcendent," nonetheless reveals itself variously; this must be necessary, otherwise the sacred would be entirely unavailable and inaccessible, and thus irrelevant, perhaps along the lines of engaging some phenomenon, say, in the galaxy Andromeda where no relevant mutual access obtains. But, according to the terms of particular religious traditions, the sacred breaks through time and space and reveals itself in and through particular empirical phenomena: holy word or teaching, natural or aesthetic beauty, holy objects or persons. Immanence may extend to sacramentality—the physical object, event, or person becomes a visible sign of an invisible reality: the presence of God or the sacred. At its zenith, the arc of immanence meets and reveals the presence of the divine in a direct and complete way. Jesus, Hindu *avatāra*s, certain kinds of gurus, indicate this in various Christian and Hindu conceptualizations. Nevertheless, the arc of immanence that falls short of a full and complete embodiment of the divine—"esteemed teacher," holy one, saint, zaddik—nonetheless also reveals, in and through one's association, intimacy or communion with the sacred, the reality and presence of the divine. The guru or zaddik, insofar as cultivating human excellence and drawing from the formative resources of their traditions, becomes a mirror to an ultimate human potential. A famous saying in Hasidism registers the transformative power of example, "I did not go to the 'Maggid' of Meseritz to learn Torah from him but to watch him tie his boot-laces" (Scholem 1941, 344). In this case, the zaddik becomes "the living incarnation of the Torah" (Scholem 1941, 344). That is, he becomes an embodiment of a particularly compelling way of being human as articulated in revelation and tradition; he becomes a "demonstration" of God in the end perhaps more persuasive than intellectual disputation or argument. While the scope of immanence here may not necessarily register complete (metaphysical) identification with the sacred, such zaddikkim and gurus nonetheless reveal, in their respective traditions, the fullest potential of humanity. And that potential is divine.

NOTES

1. These texts are typically characterized as "prakarana" works, texts that provide an epitome or summary of basic tenets of a tradition, in this case, Advaita. The *Atmabodha* ("Knowledge of the Self") is traditionally ascribed to Śaṅkara (c. eighth

century CE), though in all likelihood a later disciple composed the text, synthesizing classic Advaitin notions concerning ignorance, superimposition, and saving wisdom. The *Vedāntasāra* ("Essence of Vedanta") is a condensed rendering of Advaitin thought written by the sage Sadānanda in the fifteenth century. It covers standard Advaitin topics, includes references to the Upanishads, and briefly engages opponents to Advaita, such as materialists and Buddhists.

2. "Prasāda" means "favor," "kindness," "grace," but in Hindu ritual circumstances refers to sanctified food offerings that are returned to the devotee as a blessing or grace. Consuming the food, in contact with the sacred, becomes an opportunity for holy communion, as it were.

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Chapter 9

Reading Eros, Sacred Place, and Divine Love in the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim

Yudit Kornberg Greenberg

Erotic love is the leitmotif that characterizes two of the best poems ever produced, the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim (Song of Songs).[1] These lyrical poems are teeming with manifold cultural tropes, and contribute to the richness of the cross-cultural study of religious love and desire. Shir Ha-Shirim has been the most quoted biblical book, inspiring a plethora of literature, theology, liturgy, art, and music. The Gītāgovinda, the twelfth-century Sanskrit poem composed by the Bengali poet Jayadeva, depicting the passionate love between Kṛiṣṇa and Rādhā, is one of the most popular works in Vaiṣṇava Hinduism. There are more than forty commentaries on the Gītāgovinda, and its lyrics have been set to devotional music, dance, and paintings throughout India. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Gītāgovinda has been claimed as the Indian "Song of Songs."[2]

While there are several compelling resemblances between the two poems that are worthy of examination, my objective in this chapter is to initiate their comparative study with a focus on the role that imagery from the natural world plays in depicting the physical beauty of the lovers and their sexual desire. In this context, I will also consider the implications of overt and suggestive languages of erotic love in this poetry for the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish sacred literature and theology (Clooney 2010).[3]

Eros has been understood by philosophers from Plato, Aristotle, and the Neo-Platonists as passionate desire for union with the beloved.[4] Such love stems, to a large extent, from the physical separation of the lovers from each other.[5] The vicissitudes of eros are the determining signs of such love and comprise absence and longing for the presence of the beloved; their elusiveness and their possession; emotional and physical wounds inflicted upon one another; the ecstasy of union and the pain of separation; forgiveness and reconciliation; desire and fulfillment. While this dynamic dominates both

the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim, the nuanced features of erotic love represent unmistakable geographic locations and historical/mythological narratives of which these texts speak.

In considering erotic love in Shir Ha-Shirim and the Gītāgovinda, it is important to note that the erotic in general, whether in the visual arts or in poetry, had been differently esteemed in the broader traditions from which these texts were created. Shir Ha-Shirim is an inimitable voice in the Hebrew Bible. There is no other book, or even a chapter in the bible that celebrates sexual desire. Shir Ha-Shirim, eight chapters in length, comprises a series of dialogues spoken chiefly between the male lover and his female beloved. This dialogical feature contributes to the notion of erotic mutuality that permeates the Song. The Gītāgovinda, consisting of twelve chapters and further divided into twenty-four songs, is a poem, not embedded in scriptures, yet derived its inspiration from the sacred texts of the Bhagavata. While celebrating religious fervor intertwined with eroticism, the Gītāgovinda explicitly introduces Vaiṣṇava theology and references to deities, primarily to Lord Kṛiṣṇa.[6]

In both Shir Ha-Shirim and the Gītāgovinda, the woman's voice is the dominant one. This feature has led some scholars to suggest that Shir Ha-Shirim was composed by a woman.[7] Furthermore, it has been suggested in contemporary feminist interpretations that the Song of Songs redeems the problematic rhetoric of gender and sexuality in the bible, especially in the Genesis narrative of the Garden of Eden. Scholars such as Phyllis Trible have pointed out that whereas in the Genesis story, hierarchical and dualistic thinking dominate notions of gender and sexuality, Shir Ha-Shirim has engendered notions of positive sexuality and an egalitarian relationship, focusing especially on the portrayal of the woman lover who asserts her emotions and desires.[8]

Rabbi Akivah's (50–135 CE) defense of the song during the debate in the Sanhedrin as to whether to include it in the Bible suggests that some rabbis read the song literally as a dialogue of love between a man and a woman. This debate displays the common rabbinic ambivalence toward explicit expressions of sexuality. Paradoxically, the song came to occupy a most elevated place in the Jewish canon as "the holiest book," due to Akivah's statement during the debate as recorded in Mishnah Yadayim, 3:5: "For the entire world was never so worthy as on the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, since all of scripture is holy, and the Song of Songs is holy of holies."

This shift in perspective toward the song is the result of its allegorical interpretation, first advanced by Rabbi Akivah and since adopted by both Jews and Christians. Accordingly, the song has been interpreted as an allegory for the love of Israel and God, manifested in the liberation of the people from Egypt and the giving of the Torah.[9] Both Christian and Jewish mystics have also advanced the idea that the female represents the individual soul in an intimate

relationship with God. Over the centuries, and especially in the middle ages, its verses had inspired vast literature of commentary as well as new poetry. This is especially evident in the mystical writings of the Kabbalists and the Christian saints.[10] The following statement by the medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides attests to the song's pivotal role in philosophical and spiritual discourse: "What is the love of God that is befitting? . . . One should be continually enraptured by it, like a love-sick individual. . . . This Solomon expressed allegorically in the sentence, 'for I am sick with love . . .'" (Hilchot Teshuvah 10:3; Hyamson 1965). Since the sixteenth century, with the inspiration of kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria (the Ari), who incorporated the song into the ritual of welcoming the Sabbath, it has also played a performative and liturgical role in the weekly recitation by Kabbalists and Sephardic Jews on the eve of the Sabbath. Other occasions of the song's recitation include the last day of the spring holiday of Passover and at weddings.

Gītāgovinda is integral to India's long tradition of erotic sacred literature as well as its erotic architecture and its visual and performing arts.[11] Already in the Atharva Veda, *kama* is elevated to the status of a god, and is afforded supremacy over the other deities (*Atharva Veda* 9.2.19–20, 25). In the Brhad-Âranyaka Upanishad, there are depictions of sexual acts categorized as acts of procreation, sacrifice, and as actions that serve as meditation. Even though liberation (*moksha*) is the ultimate goal of life, Hindu religion prescribes two primary spiritual paths— the path of renunciates and the path of householder. For the householder, *kāma* is elevated to the same plane as *artha and dharma.* It *is* therefore no surprise that ancient Hindu culture and religion not only tolerated erotic literature, but embraced it. Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasutra* may be the best known Indian literary work on sex and erotic love, but several other prominent Sanskrit as well as poets and playwrights writing in the vernacular celebrated sensuality in works such as Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava.* According to the Hindu theory of aesthetic enjoyment or *rasa*, which classifies human emotions, *śṛṇgārarasa* (erotic pleasure) is a highly celebrated emotion in Sanskrit poetry.[12] The Gītāgovinda has played a pivotal role in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, having been expressed through dance for at least five hundred years, in the Orissi dance style that originated in the Jagannāth Temple. Not only in Bengal but also in Nepal, the Gītāgovinda is sung during the spring celebration in honor of the goddess Sarasvatī in which worship is offered to the god of love, kāmadeva, and his consort. In the Jagannāth Temple in Puri as well as in other temples, the song is sung daily.

A profound parallel in the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim is the ubiquity of imagery from nature during springtime.[13] The natural world is integral and woven into the fabric of the verses and is interlaced with the moods of the lovers. To begin with, the rendezvous take place during the spring, and they occur amid nature's fecundity, either in the forest in Vṛndāvan (Gītāgovinda)

or the garden, the hills, and desert of Israel. Furthermore, reveling in the beauty and sensuality of the lovers' bodies in both poems is often described in analogy to trees, fruits, flowers, animals, and geographic areas. Body parts in both poems are often described as comparable to fruits, trees, and even animals.

In Shir Ha-Shirim, the lovers are assimilated into their environment and are associated with specific locations in the land of Israel. "I am a flower of Sharon, a water-lily growing in the valleys" (2.1–2). "Until the day breathes, and the shadows flee, turn my beloved, and flee like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether" (2.16–17). "Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down mount Gilead" (6:5).

In the Gītāgovinda, the forest is the location of the lovers' rendezvous. Kṛiṣṇa and Rādhā's encounters occur in the forest in Vṛindāvan, on the banks of the river Yamuna, and the Manasa-sarovara Lake, as these verses reveal: "O my dear friend, the mango trees in the forest groves of Vṛindāvana are covered with freshly sprouted buds because they are thrilled by the embrace of the restless creepers . . . Śrī Hari is affectionately playing with young women in the pure water of the Yamuna that flows alongside those forest groves" (Gītāgovinda, Song 3:34).

The imagery of the land in Shir Ha-Shirim includes its native flowers and its fruit trees whose scents and fruits joyfully announce spring. The lovers are invited to recognize these signs of spring— the flowers and vines are blossoming, the new figs are apparent, and the dove is calling.

These images of ripened fruits, especially of pomegranates and grapes, map the climate of their love. The pomegranate in particular has a prominent place in the Song where it appears six times. A native to the land, the *rimon* (pomegranate) is used in metaphors for skin color and wine drinking (Shir Ha-Shirim 4.3, 13; 6.7, 11; 7.13; 8.2). The multiplicity of its seeds is a known symbol of fertility and its blossoms are a sign of the timeliness of love in ancient Near Eastern literature.

In parallel with Shir Ha-Shirim, references to a variety of native flowers and scents abound in the Gītāgovinda:

> Varieties of flowers are opening and tearing open the hearts of lonely lovers. . . . Once, in the splendid spring season, when Radhika was pining for Kṛiṣṇa, she began to search for him in one forest grove after another. . . . The nectar of spring flowers and the aroma of jasmine blossoms are enthralling. . . . His tender lips are an enchanting soft reddish color like the bud of a scarlet mallow flower. . . . The blueness of my throat is not the effect of poison, but a garland of blue lotus flowers. . . . The bow of fresh petal-like eyebrows. . . . Your lips, as soft and red as *bimba* fruit . . . O Śrī Kṛiṣṇa, my sakhī Rādhā is behaving exactly like a deer. . . . My beloved Candi, O hot-tempered woman, your enchanting red lips

> are friends with the luster of a bandhūka flower. Your cool cheeks have assumed the splendor of a madhūka flower. Your nose is like a sesame flower. Your teeth are as radiant as jasmine blossoms. O beloved, the flower archer Kāmadeva worshipped your face with his five flower arrows and then conquered the entire universe. (Gītāgovinda, Song 5:4–8; Song 7:11; Song 15:23; Song 19:14)

Within the plethora of botanical references, the lotus flower, a sacred flower in Hinduism symbolizing purity, is applied to both Rādhā and Kṛiṣṇa:

> O Deva! O Hari! Your wide eyes resemble the petals of an immaculate lotus flower. . . . With his soft, dark limbs that surpass the beauty of a blue lotus flower. . . . Her lotus eyes glance in all directions, scattering the rain of her teardrops like water-speckled lotus flowers detached from their stems. . . . Her cheek resembles the beauty of the newly risen moon in the twilight sky when she sits alone in a secluded place, holding it upon her reddish lotus hand. . . . Kṛiṣṇa . . . is the bumblebee who drinks the honey of Rādhā's lotus face. . . . Your eyes eclipse the beauty of a blue lotus flower. (Song 19:14)

The ubiquity of the natural landscape and its lushness merge with the personalities and moods of the protagonists. The lovers are not only an integral part of nature; moreover, they domesticate it as its stewards. In the Gītāgovinda, both Kṛiṣṇa and the gopīs herd cows, and the man and woman in Shir Ha-Shirim are referred to as shepherd and shepherdess. In Shir Ha-Shirim 1:7 for instance, she asks him: "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you bring your flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that veils herself beside the flocks of your companions? And he answers her in 1:8, "If you know not, O you fairest among women, go forth by the footsteps of the flock and feed your kids, beside the shepherds' tents."

How do the analogies to flora and fauna of the lovers' bodies contribute to the sensuality and eroticism celebrated in the two poems? What role do the references to historic events, geographic locations, and mythological narratives play therein? Could these images enhance the fecundity of erotic desire spoken of by their poets?

In Shir Ha-Shirim, images of breasts as two fawns, hair like a flock of goats streaming down from mount Gilead, teeth like a flock of sheep, and so forth, embody the integration of the lovers' bodies with the sensuality of the flora and fauna of the land of Israel. Framing bodies in the terrain, countryside, and the rhythms of fauna can also be understood as contributing to the eroticization of the landscape as much as the lovers.

The juxtaposition of erotic bodies and scenery in Shir Ha-Shirim and the Gītāgovinda and the similes of nature employed in both poems provide a valuable basis for comparing the confluence of eros and religious experience

in both traditions. Moreover, the Gītāgovinda, regardless of its abundant similes of nature, is imbued with direct and transparent sexuality. Although Rādhā and Kṛiṣṇa suffer from periods of separation from each other, their bodies are often portrayed as if in the midst of a sexual experience that takes place in the present, rather than as imagined and distant objects. Her eyes are not only analogized as lotus-shaped, but are "languid with passion's drunkenness" (Gītāgovinda, Song 19:15). Other examples from the Gītāgovinda of erotic bodies and vivid sexual experiences include: "her fortunate body bears drops of sweat . . . ," "upon a delightful-woman's face, where love has arisen where a lower lip is turned for a kiss . . . ," "the pitcher of your breast is more heavy and full of juice than coconuts," and "oh, you who bear the burden of firm breasts and thighs . . ." (Gītāgovinda, Song 23:14).

Frequent and explicit sexual encounters in the Gītāgovinda also include references to bodily movements and positions during coition, such as sweat, scratches, shaking, and vivid sexual exertion. For example: "Punish me, lovely fool! Bite me with your cruel teeth! Chain me with your creeper arms! Crush me with your hard breasts!" (Gītāgovinda, Song 19:11) . . . "Drops of red lac from her lotus feet wet your sublime breast . . . the teeth mark she left on your lip creates anguish in my heart" (Gītāgovinda, Song 17:5–6).

In Shir Ha-Shirim, there are explicit references to kisses and touch, but these are often spoken in the future tense and couched as longing for such encounters. Take for example the opening line of the song: "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth . . . and he shall lie all night between my breasts." Their desire for each other's body and their anticipation of a meeting is expressed in the future tense, rather than the present tense that permeates references to physical encounters in the Gītāgovinda. The following verse, while more explicit in its reference to a sexual experience, still seems to convey a desire for a future encounter: "This form of yours is like a palm tree and your breasts like clusters of grapes. I said, 'I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs. May your breasts be as clusters of the vine . . .'" (Shir Ha-Shirim, 7:8). An example of an overt sexual encounter is the verse, "His left arm is beneath my head, his right arm embraces me."

However, the love language of Shir Ha-Shirim is more suggestive of a sexual encounter and is often expressed in botanical metaphors rather than in direct language as indicated in the following: "a garden is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed . . . let my beloved come into his garden, to eat his pleasant fruits (4:12) . . . I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride. I have plucked my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey . . ." (5:1). Here, the woman is in the garden and, at the same time, she embodies the garden. While the lover's actions in the garden allude to a sexual experience, the metaphorical language diffuses explicit sexual tensions between the lovers, especially in comparison to the Gītāgovinda.

To reiterate, in both songs we find the preponderance of similes of the landscape of the lands of India and Israel. Furthermore, we note that the holiness of Jerusalem, Vrindavan, and the Yamuna river serve as the backdrop for the lovers' erotic desire for each other. While the entire land is holy for Jews, the holiest site in the land of Israel is Jerusalem. Thus, we read recurrent references to Jerusalem in Shir Ha-Shirim. The woman often speaks to the "Daughters of Jerusalem," who appear seven times in the song. Also, there is a direct association of the woman's beauty with Jerusalem: "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem" (6:4). In the Hindu tradition, one of the holiest rivers is Yamuna, and Jayadeva makes abundant references to it in the Gītāgovinda. Also, the forest of Vrindavan, which serves as the location for Kṛiṣṇa 's rendezvous with Rādhā, is a pilgrimage site in Vaishnavism for its association with the life of Kṛiṣṇa . Weaving such sacred places into the poetry of the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim where lover and beloved meet contributes to the poetry's allegorical and spiritual meanings.

The wilderness of the forest, the open spaces of the hills and the desert, the dynamism of the fauna, and the lushness of the garden in Shir Ha-Shirim and the Gītāgovinda underpin the unstable nature of erotic love as represented in the poetry. The Shulamite and Rādhā—the female protagonists—are often portrayed as love-sick due to the pain of separation from their lovers. In the Gītāgovinda, Kṛiṣṇa 's rendezvous in the forest encompasses numerous gopīs who are enamored of him. These trysts with other women are portrayed quite explicitly: "he hugs one, he kisses another, and he kisses another dark beauty . . . while *hari* roamed in the forest making love to all the women, Rādhā's hold on him loosened . . ." Ultimately, in his deep love for Rādhā, Kṛiṣṇa repents, changing his demeanor and promising Rādhā absolute fidelity.

In comparing the relationships of lover and beloved in both songs, we note the dynamic of "love in separation" (*viraha*) as a dominant motif, yet the cause of the lover's absence is at times vague (Dimock 1989). In Kṛiṣṇa 's case, his absence is associated with having sexual encounters with multiple *gopis* until he is finally ready to commit to Rādhā. In contrast, even in the midst of acknowledging numerous "wives and concubines," the male lover in Shir Ha-Shirim is never portrayed as desiring or being with them. In fact, he differentiates between his beloved and his other relationships: "but unique is my dove, my perfect one." The Shulamite alludes to the presence of other women who are attracted to her lover when she states, "maidens love you . . ." Yet it is not clear whether his absence is related to infidelity, as the poet does not link his absence to other romantic interests. King Solomon, to whom Shir Ha-Shirim is attributed, is known from other biblical sources to have had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. It is ironic, therefore, that Shir Ha-Shirim is suggestive of an exclusive erotic love relationship, whereas

the exclusive love that Kṛiṣṇa has for Rādhā evolves, and is portrayed as the culmination of the Gītāgovinda.

Who and what the protagonists represent in Shir Ha-Shirim and the Gītāgovinda can be ascertained on the basis of both literal and allegorical readings of the songs as we already established earlier in the chapter. Kṛiṣṇa is referred to, by its author, Jayadeva, as both "Lord of the World," the incarnation of the god Vishnu as well as a human lover, understood as a divine reincarnation. In Shir Ha-Shirim, where the name of God is not mentioned, the male character according to a literal reading of the text is either a shepherd or King Solomon, but clearly not God. It is only in the commentaries to Shir Ha-Shirim that we are presented with the allegorical interpretation, namely, that the male lover in the song represents God. The allegorical interpretation of Shir Ha-Shirim is found in the Jewish Mishnah, the Targum, the Midrash Rabbah, and in medieval Jewish commentaries by Saadia, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra. The Targum (ancient Aramaic translation) on Shir Ha-Shirim for example interprets it as expressing the love of God toward His people manifested in periods of history from the Exodus until the coming of the Messiah.

The Gītāgovinda, in its literal meaning is both about a divine as well as human love affair; that is, between a humanly incarnated god and humanly incarnated goddess. According to the Vaiṣṇava tradition, Rādhā is a goddess who is both human and divine (Hawley and Wulff 1986). In Shir Ha-Shirim, the female beloved is a woman; only in the rabbinic and Kabbalistic commentaries and interpretations of the song is she allegorized as the nation of Israel, or as the soul. Interestingly, in a reversal of the common tendency to depict God as male, in some of the allegorical interpretations of the Gītāgovinda, Krisna represents the human soul that is subject to uncontrollable desires, whereas Rādhā is seen as the symbol of "love from heaven," as *prema*—divine, unconditional love.

CONCLUSION

Sacred texts such as Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim, along with their interpretations, testify to the reality that spiritual adepts from diverse theistic traditions contemplate the divine through notions of human embodiment. Such contemplations depict an intense intimacy of lover and beloved, but how do portrayals of such intimacy as expressed in the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim differ, and what might be the implications of such differences for comparative theology?

In the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, (sexual) desire is problematized. While Shir Ha-Shirim represents a welcome alternative to the Garden of

Eden, I believe that its author is still cautious in conveying sexuality in its tangible fullness. This might explain the metaphoric embellishments and subtleties of the references to human sexuality in Shir Ha-Shirim, as human sexual desire is potentially problematic and sexual conduct is highly regulated in biblical and rabbinic Judaism. In other words, the major difference between Shir Ha-Shirim and the Gītāgovinda is that in Shir Ha-Shirim, in contrast to the Gītāgovinda, the lovers do not consummate their union, despite their deep yearning for each other. While both female protagonists suffer the pain of separation from their beloved, Rādhā and Kṛiṣṇa do consummate their love in the end.

How would this characteristic of Shir Ha-Shirim, in contrast with the Gītāgovinda, be understood in theological terms (Schweig 2005)? The fluidity and/or the interchangeability and identity of human and divine in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, as attested in the Gītāgovinda, marks a theological difference between the two poems and the two traditions. However, there is a deeply guarded distinction and rigid boundary between the human and the divine in biblical and rabbinic Judaism. Whereas spiritual bliss or *ānanda* through the union of the atman and the Brahman is an achievable goal in Hindu belief, we find the recurrence of frustration, failure, and longing for a loving divine intervention in Jewish thought. The exile of Israel from its promised land signifies its separation from God, explained theologically as divine punishment for Israel's sins as conveyed in the literary imagination of its scholars and poets throughout its history. Although the belief in the messianic promise is upheld, the embodied experience of love of God in Jewish literature has been predominantly one of absence and longing, rather than presence and fulfillment. This pattern parallels the dynamic in Shir Ha-Shirim, and is juxtaposed with the longing for a stable relationship as the poet exclaims: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; its darts are darts of fire, a flame forever blazing" (Shir Ha-Shirim, 8:6).

With the focus on erotic love in the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim, I uncovered similarities and differences not only in poetic form and content but also in the qualities of the divine-human encounter in both traditions. In addition to the backdrop for the intensification of eros provided by the imagery of flora and fauna, we also highlighted the dialogical dimension operating in both sublime poems. The modern Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig captures this dialogical element that comprises divine and human love thus: "Love is speech, wholly active, wholly personal, wholly living, wholly speaking."[14] I believe that my brief theological reflections serve as a nod toward future scholarship in the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish sacred literature.

NOTES

1. Song of Songs is also known as Canticles and the Song of Solomon. Masterpieces of erotic poetry and prose include the troubadours, Shakespeare, Dante, Rumi, and Teresa of Avila.

2. See Arnold, Sir Edwin. 1994. *Light of Asia and the Indian Song of Songs.* New Delhi: Crest Publishing House. He explains that his title "The Indian Song of Songs" is justified insofar as both the Gītāgovinda and Shir Ha-Shirim are mystical allegory. See also Siegel, Lee. 1978. *Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions, as Exemplified in the Gītāgovinda of Jayadeva*, Oxford University Press. Siegel makes several observations and speculations regarding the similarities between the two texts. For example, he suggests that following interpretations of Shir Ha-Shirim as allegory may have led Europeans to interpret the Gītāgovinda as an allegory. He also cites Christian commentators on Shir Ha-Shirim such as Tertullian and Gregory of Nyssa, who liken the lovers in the Song to the soul and God. At the same time, some scholars such as Graham M. Schweig claimed that the Rasa Lila, more than the Gītāgovinda, is India's Shir Ha-Shirim, since it is more firmly rooted in scripture, namely the Bhagavata Purana.

3. In 2003, I participated in a fruitful discussion in a session at the American Academy of Religion on the erotic figuring of the divine sponsored by the comparative studies of Hinduisms and Judaisms. This chapter is a modest beginning in the comparative study of the two poems.

4. Dante follows this trend of universalizing desire as a cosmic phenomenon, "as the force that moves the sun and the other stars."

5. On the theme of love in separation, see Valency, Maurice Jacques. 1961. *In Praise of Love: Introduction to the Love Poetry of the Renaissance*. New York: Macmillan; De Rougemont, Denis. 1983. *Love in the Western World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Dimock, Edward C. 1989. *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava-Sahajiya Cult of Bengal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

6. On the topic of dialogue in the Song of Songs, see Franz Rosenzweig. 1971. *The Star of Redemption*. Translated by William W. Hallo. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 173–179.

7. See for instance Renita Weems. 1992. "Song of Songs," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Carol A. Newsome and Sharon A. Ringe. Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, p. 157.

8. Trible, Phyllis. 1978. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, especially pp. 144–166.

9. For Christians beginning with Origen, the bridegroom represented Christ and the bride is a representation of the Church. Later Christian scholars have also allegorized Song of Songs as God's love for the Virgin Mary.

10. See for example Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs for Christian poetry. Perhaps the best examples from Jewish literature is the erotic literature of the Zohar.

11. The sculptures at the temples in Khajuraho are foremost examples of erotic art.

12. See for example Barbara Holdrege's entry on Rasa in the *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, 2008, pp. 501–502.
13. A well-known motif that is associated with fertility and pagan culture.
14. Rosenzweig, 1971, p. 202.

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Chapter 10

On the Comparative Realization of Aesthetic Consciousness in Kabbalah and Tantra

Paul C. Martin

In this chapter my aim is to compare the place of God in the esoteric or mystical schools of thought known as Jewish kabbalah and Hindu tantra.[1] I shall do so by arguing that the practitioners of these two ways of realizing the functional nature of the divine are similarly demonstrating an aesthetic consciousness, one that is established by a deep and abiding appreciation of God as presentatively available to the human mind. While the two traditions to be examined here may be spatially and temporally apart—the zoharic kabbalah as expounded in Castile in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the Śaiva tantra as elaborated in Kashmir in the ninth through eleventh centuries—they nevertheless invite juxtaposition at a phenomenological and psychological level.[2] Moreover, while the specific formulation of the nature of God as a transcendent yet immanent reality may vary in kabbalah and tantra, there is comparability to the extent that the practitioners experience an affective and cognitive state that is often articulated through allusive and figurative language. In line with a phenomenological hermeneutic, I shall descriptively set out the encounter with the given nature of God as reported by the practitioners, and how this may be interpreted as a realization that is sublime and beautiful.[3] The comparative denominator is an illuminating awareness of the manner of divine presentation, which is signaled through the discursive and image-laden consciousness, and which is judged to be a work of art.

THE POWER OF THE SUBLIME

A predominant theme in early Jewish mysticism was that of *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, the Account of the Chariot, in which Ezekiel envisioned the

obscure form of God in a cloud of fire (Ezek. 1:1–28). God himself, or at least the figure of God, is seated on a radiant throne, which has the appearance of sapphire (*sappir*), and which is carried by four winged living creatures (*ḥayyot*) in human form, with sparkling wheels (*ofanim*) underneath. The chariot throne moves through an expanse, which has "an awe-inspiring gleam as of crystal." Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly realms and divine presence is the subject of much deliberation in the *Heikhalot* literature, where the prayers of the mystical explorers ascend progressively through the seven halls or palaces to reach the majestic throne room located in the seventh hall (Schäfer 2011, 244–94).[4] In the *Heikhalot* section of the book *Zohar* (1:38a–45b and 2.244b–268b), the halls are depicted as firmaments between the *sefirot* and the manifest universe, and are populated by angelic beings.[5] These places are called *livnat ha-sapir* (sapphire pavement), *etsem ha-shamayim* (the essence of heaven) or *zohar* (radiance), *nogah* (brilliance), *zekhut* (merit), *ahavah* (love), *ratson* (good-will), and *kodesh ha-kodashim* (holy of holies) (Tishby 1989, 2:591; Wolski and Hecker 2017, 26–53). In zoharic symbolism the *sefirot* themselves variously assume the form of a chariot (Tishby 1989, 2:588–89). Thus, in one account in the *Zohar*, Shekhinah is the throne carried by "four magnificent, supernal, sacred creatures" (angels), and Tif'eret sits on this throne. Also, Shekhinah is "a color blended of all colors," of Tif'eret (green), Gevurah (red), and Ḥesed (white). She is like a cloud in which the *sefirotic* light "scatters" (reflects and refracts) to produce a rainbow (1:71b).[6]

One of the powers in the chariot is the *ḥashmal*, which is a dynamorphic flashing fire that flares and sparks, the terrific vision of which confounds the minds of all those except Moses (*Zohar Ḥadash* 38b–c; in Wolski and Hecker 2017, 456–61). The motive force for the wheels is imparted by the Holy Spirit through the living beings (2:241b–242a). The Holy Spirit is explicitly identified with Shekhinah, who is otherwise known as the Divine Presence (2:97b). Shekhinah is also associated with Meṭaṭron (1:179b), who is the wheel that is aligned with each of the creatures, and who is "more grand and splendid than the other forces" (1:21a). The chief angel Meṭaṭron is called "the Master of Wings," and superintends the Academy of Heaven, the scholarly abode of the righteous. The companions of the *Zohar* are flown to this realm on the wings of angels, whereupon they are made resplendent (1:4a–b; cf. 3:173a). They register the gift of wisdom, which vibrates in them: "Rabbi Shim'on wept, and said, 'I know for sure that supernal Holy Spirit pulsates within you'" (2:147a). The masters of kabbalah are called the wise ones (*ha-maskilim*), who shine and radiate, for this is their leitmotif: "The enlightened will shine like the radiance of the sky, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (2:23a, citing Daniel 12:3). Indeed, the kabbalist is exulted in gazing at the sky (which symbolizes Tif'eret), where the "radiance of understanding of holy knowledge settles upon him, adorning that

person, and all are in awe of him" (2:57a). The masters are enjoined to "serve YHVH in awe, and rejoice in trembling" (Psalms 2:11), where YHVH is corresponded with Tif'eret and "awe" with Shekhinah (3:56a).

In the teaching that was revealed to Vasugupta (ca. 800–50 CE) and set down by him or his pupil Kallaṭa in the *Śiva Sūtra* (hereafter ŚSū),[7] it is asserted that the yogi fundamentally shares in that light of universal consciousness which is called Śiva. The yogi can go beyond his own limited (ignorant) state of knowledge through the act of reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśa*) by realizing the subjective infiltration of Śiva's pervasive I-consciousness. As he travels through "the stations and stages of *yoga*" the yogi experiences a "fascinating wonder [*vismaya*]" (ŚSū 1.12).[8] Sūtra 2.5 affirms this: "When the knowledge innately inherent in one's own nature arises, (that is) Śiva's state—(the gesture of) the one who wanders in the Sky of Consciousness" (Dyczkowski 1992, 76). The yogi in this knowing gesture of divinity moves across the expanse or void of consciousness. His contemplation of identity with Śiva is symbolized as a mental sitting, with the "seat" (*āsana*) here being the power of the highest *śakti*, that is, *parāśakti* (ŚSū 3.16). In other words, the yogi is a god who sits on the throne that is reified as the goddess. According to the tenth or eleventh century Śākta text, *Yoginīhṛdaya* ("The Heart of the Yoginī"), which extols the Goddess Tripurasundarī, the *tattva*s make up her throne,[9] while the commentator Amṛtānanda interprets the *śrīcakra* itself as the throne of the Goddess (Padoux 2013, 116–17). As a convention, the yogi would situate himself in the *maṇḍala* of divinity.

According to the theology of *Spanda* (Doctrine of Vibration), the shining consciousness of Bhairava—a fearsome form of Śiva—is in a state of perpetual vibration (*spanda*), and manifestly appears as reality. The contemplation of one's own true nature (*svabhāva*) as conforming to this pulsating radiance means that the life of divinity is found in the beating heart of Śiva (Singh 1980). In the theology of *Pratyabhijñā* (Doctrine of Recognition), the realization is given as a state of reflective awareness, which corresponds to the supreme Word (*parāvāk*), who has ultimate creative power (ĪPK 1.5.13). As Utpaladeva explains: "It is the luminous vibrating (*sphurattā*), the absolute being (*mahāsattā*), unmodified by space and time; it is that which is said to be the heart (*hṛdayam*) of the supreme Lord, insofar as it is his essence" (ĪPK 1.5.14). Śiva is the essential light (*prakāśa*), the intuitive ground of consciousness, whereas *śakti* is the phenomenal light (*vimarśa*), the flash of representations, which is realized by thought-constructs, or, in effect, the imaginative power. When the yogi's identity with divine consciousness is dwelt upon continually, it leads to a permanent condition of absorption—an incorporation into pervasiveness (PH 19). The *Vijñānabhairava* as a manual of yogic instruction states that to be still and to gaze fixedly at the clear sky, one will acquire the divine nature (VBh 84). Furthermore, "One should

contemplate the entire sky which is the nature of Bhairava as if it is pervading one's head. Then (one experiences) everything as the form of Bhairava and one enters into the glory of His nature" (VBh 85; see also v. 92).[10] Bhairava as the ultimate reality is irreducible and is not an object that can be known or grasped, and to contemplate this voidness is to gain enlightenment (VBh 127).

What can we glean from these brief observations about the nature of God and its realization through the mental faculties, as this is set out in the expository systems of kabbalah and tantra? We can conclude that a common characteristic is an attitude that corresponds to the notion of the sublime, since it involves being transported on high by a consciousness struck with wonder at the physical and spiritual worlds, which are seen as diffusing into each other. The modern aesthetic concept of the sublime is a philosophical development from the ancient idea of the literary or rhetorical sublime, as a grand and noble style of writing or speaking that elevates the mind of the reader, and moreover inspires an emotional attachment (Costelloe 2012; Doran 2015). While the enunciations of kabbalah and tantra may show the communicative intent of a sublime narrative, they also afford the notion of a philosophical sublime. So if the later idea of the sublime is about the reception of, and response to, magnitude and power, then in both the kabbalistic and tantric conception the vibrant expanse of the sky provides an apt location for metaphorizing the realm of consciousness, as the mind opens up to the immensity of divine space. The practitioners of kabbalah and tantra realize that the scope of God is transcendently unlimited, that is, without end or unsurpassable (*ein sof* or *anuttara*), yet they recognize that the place of God is at the same time immanently delimited. This belief is rated as sublime because the mind is confronted by that which it ostensibly cannot comprehend and before which it stands in astonishment, as well as in awe and reverence; still, the mind can aspire to know (or ascend to knowing) by dint of the exercise of practical knowledge held close or even secretly by the tradition.

The followers of the way of kabbalah and tantra endeavor to reach a state of awareness that is favorable to seeing that God is presentatively working in reality through the auspices of the *sefirot* and *tattva*s, that is, those agential principles or qualities that underlie divine and mundane reality. In each case, when the consciousness of these pervasive forces or entified properties of God is attained, it becomes an object of sensible cognition and is regarded as extraordinary or marvelous. Aesthetically, it is a sublime mode of realization, and the kabbalistic and tantric practitioners are well disposed to represent the infinite idea of God as being amazing and awesome; indeed, they are compelled to gaze at the divine void through the overwhelming sense of light, in the vibration of consciousness that is *holy spirit* and *śakti*. By virtue of this aesthetic perception, which devolves upon an aesthetic attitude (a special state of mind), it illustrates how the encounter with the general idea of the

divine is similarly realized in the two traditions, even though, needless to say, the particular understanding in each tradition differs, greatly or otherwise.

THE TASTE OF BEAUTY

The theosophical kabbalah appeals to the basic idea that "[b]y actions below are aroused actions above, and an action below must be displayed like the action above" (*Zohar* 3:38b). When a person demonstrates a worthy action, he is sanctified by a holy spirit that settles upon him (3:86b). The *Zohar* proclaims that a human being is a microcosm; as Rabbi Shim'on explains: "Come and see: The blessed Holy One formed the human being corresponding to the pattern above, all according to wisdom, for you cannot find a single human limb not founded upon supernal wisdom" (1:186b). There is an erotic element involved in the mirroring as the performance of virtuous deeds stimulates Shekhinah to unite with her cosmic partner Tif'eret (2:173b; cf. 3:121a–b). The kabbalists as masters of Torah are exhorted not to let the light of the commandments be extinguished by sin (3:113a). As mentioned, the *sefirot* are attributive or qualified powers of God, which are constitutively arranged as the divine body, Adam Kadmon; and as far as these aspects are imbued by the kabbalist, he becomes that divine man.

The kabbalist imagines a landscape of heaven, and in doing so he frequently has recourse to liquid allusions. Indeed, the sefirotic realm may be said to be a lacustrine environment, and it is notable that water is correlated with light (2:2a; cf. 3:67b–68a).[11] A typical allusion is to reference the biblical phrase, "A river issues from Eden to water the garden" (Gen. 2:10),[12] which is understood to symbolize the divine flow of emanation that is crystallized as a crowning adornment of beauty (3:61b–62a). The reward for the souls of the righteous is to ascend nightly to the (supernal) Garden of Eden where they give and receive fragrances, while for those who depart this world they revel in the "sublime joy" of the "rivers of pure balsam" as they gaze upon Binah (the "Delightfulness of YHVH") (2:127a–b).[13] Her streaming radiance gushes upon the head of the kabbalist who engages in Torah (1:92a–b). Indeed, whoever converses in the fine words of Torah is as if imbibing honey-spiced wine, and thus satiated he "will awaken in the world that is coming" (3:39a). Entering the divine realm conceived as a sacred garden, the kabbalist is free to liaise with God, where he is saturated with delight (3:67b–68a). Tif'eret as the blessed Holy One is not only fragrant but also sweet, and is likened to an apple tree (3:74a) that grows in the Holy Apple Orchard, which is Shekhinah (3:84a). The blessing that is given after meals when the kabbalist is satisfied facilitates the nourishment of Shekhinah and her ability to sustain the world (1:207b).[14] To study Torah is to be consumed by wisdom, which is a fiery

haze: the smoke of incense that perfumes thought and the smoke of the wood-pile that is the breath of speech (Tishby, *Ra'aya Meheimna* 3:28b–29a).[15] Shekhinah is the smoke that ascends on high, and the pleasing aroma of fire and smoke leads to "a single nexus named 'tranquility'—tranquility of spirit, joy of all as one, radiance of sparkling lamps, radiance of faces" (1:70a). The aromatic prayers of worship that rise as incense toward the divine realm will bind the bonds of joy, "from above to below" (1:229b–230a).

In the non-dual metaphysics of Śaiva tantra, the human being is regarded as a microcosmic aspect of Śiva, which is to say that the individual consciousness (*citta*) is a contraction of universal consciousness (*citi*) (PH 4–5). The realization by the yogi that his own consciousness is just a reflection of the universal consciousness and that his body has no boundary with, or is transparent to, the universal body of Śiva, means he is filled with "blissful nectar" (VBh 65; cf. ŚSū 1.14). The expansion of the mind that can be occasioned by the enjoyment or pleasure of everyday activities, such as eating and drinking, or listening to music (and other "aesthetic delights"), can lead to the arising of blissful consciousness (VBh 72–73). Śakti as the heart of Śiva is the impulse that drives the universe; and at the local level she is present in the form of *kuṇḍalinī*, which is the serpentine gyre of energy that rests at the base of the spine and that when activated flows through the central nerve channel (*suṣumnā*), in the subtle analogue of the spinal column. Expediting this process involves the practice of breath control.[16] Thus the supreme state, which is consciousness of Bhairava, can be obtained through concentrating on the rhythm of in-breath (*apāna*) and out-breath (*prāṇa*). In the pivotal moment where the "energy of breath" rests in the void, the dichotomizing thought-constructs are dissolved, and so the peaceful sentiment or tranquil state (*śānta*) is revealed, through the work of Śakti (VBh 22–28).

The theology of *Pratyabhijñā* avers that Maheśvara (i.e., Śiva) is a fusion of "I-this," the undivided perceiving subject and perceptible object, whose essence is "savoring" (*camatkāra*), and whose activity "consists of supreme light and beatitude" (ĪPK and *vṛtti* 4.1 and 4.6). This process of yogic integration evokes a sense of wonderment along the way. By worshiping the two swans, Śiva and Devi (Śakti), which glide on the lake of divine knowledge, the yogi can relish the honey of wisdom (SL 38). In his exposition of the *kula* ritual—that is, the conjunction of the yogi and his consort (*dūtī*) as replicating the conjunction of Śiva and his power (*śakti*)—Abhinavagupta refers to this worship as "the essence of amazement, . . . with the flowers which arise spontaneously from the mind, which pour forth their own fragrance" (TĀ 29.176).[17] Moreover, Abhinavagupta ardently describes the realization of divine consciousness: "Where all are dissolved, where the multitudes of categories are consumed, see the funeral pyre which is located within the body, radiant as the Fire of Time!" (TĀ 29.182; cf. VBh 52). In other words, the

ego-driven gross and subtle bodies of *karma* are burnt up or sacrificed on the blazing pyre of divinity by the searing energy of *śakti* (TĀ 29.202cd–6; cf. ŚSū 2.8). By merging himself into the highest level, the yogi is "consecrated by the aroma" of divine power, which is the radiance of consciousness (ŚSūV 3.22). The outcome of this effort is a paradigm of bliss (*ānanda*) as the adept gains mastership of power. He is able to taste the "supreme nectar of immortality," which has the flavor (*rasa*) of the pure non-dual consciousness of Śiva, as realized in reflective awareness (SpVi 46).[18] When the yogi enters the state of divine consciousness, he knows that vibration (*spanda*) is the foundation of his being (SpKāVṛ 23–24).

If the state of mind incurred by approaching God represents a journey into the sublime then it is a confounding experience, and so far as this movement of consciousness betokens an encounter with the divine realm it is a felt response that can also be described as beautiful. The practitioners of kabbalah and tantra are basically intent on perceiving God as accessible and actively present in the world, as seen through the medium of the *sefirot* and *tattva*s. In being raised to a heightened level of consciousness through a mystical realization, it continues all the while to relate to a sensible awareness that draws on an analogical appeal to mundane experiences. Aesthetically, the practitioners are inclined to see, or discern, the nature of God as it is rendered in the imagination and conceptualized in the understanding, which means it is shaped by a particular hermeneutic; in that respect, the two traditions share a standard of taste, at least where "taste" connotes an enhanced and refined appreciation of the experience of reality as imbued by the divine.[19] Furthermore, the practitioners of kabbalah and tantra, for whom God and the motor principles of being (*sefirot* and *tattva*s) are existentially real, could accept that they perceive all this through an internal sense, or spiritualized sensibility, and there would be general agreement that it is felt as pleasurable, which is to say beautiful. Subjectively then, they experience a certain enjoyment in interacting with the consciousness of divinity; with, that is, the phenomenological contents of their perceptions, which engenders a mood of aesthetic contemplation.

In Kantian terms, the perceptual insight of the scope of reality acts to enliven or quicken the faculties of imagination and understanding, and it is the harmonious play of these cognitive powers that enables the realization of the field of consciousness in which beauty lies. The kabbalistic and tantric practitioners express this awareness as a natural sentiment, and relish the thought of cleaving to or being one with God. They are in search of an "aesthetic truth" about the divine, one that promises an authentic knowing, which may be recognized through a communion or union with God. The means and methods of kabbalah and tantra may differ, but in making a judgment of taste the end result is similar, which is to be acutely conscious of the

perceived placement of God in reality. To attain the most profound level of spiritual awareness, it is reckoned to be necessary to burn up the ego, which in kabbalistic terms means to overcome the propensity to disobey lawful commandments, and in tantric terms means to destroy the illusion that the individual self as a locus of consciousness is separate from the all-pervasive consciousness of Śiva. Overall, kabbalistic and tantric practitioners each wander in the palace of imagination, there to see the divine realm, while their understanding operates as the compass for directing their thought to the enunciation (spoken or written) of that beautiful realization.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that a comparative investigation of medieval kabbalah and tantra allows for the idea that the practitioners in these traditions generate an aesthetic consciousness, as they typically respond to the imaginative and thoughtful engagement with God. While I have undertaken only a limited analysis, it seems that there is a degree of commonality in the approach toward realizing the functional nature of the divine, as predicated on an ultimate plane of being that is beyond comprehension, but that can be brought within the range of human consciousness through the mediation of hypostatized or reified principles of activity, namely the *sefirot* and *tattva*s. The kabbalistic and tantric practitioner in his or her state of profound awareness is held by a sublime mood in establishing the place of God as being far yet near, ungraspable yet knowable, and upon this ground the practitioner would stand in awe and wonder. In addition, as the practitioner exhibits the suggestive freedom of imagination in concordance with the descriptive richness of understanding, he or she is encouraged to make a judgment of taste, which admits an emotional inflection, the condition of which gives in effect the standard that God is beautiful to behold. Generally, the kabbalistic and tantric practitioner is alert to the intensive qualities manifested as sublimity and beauty, which are delivered by the intuitive perception of God in an aesthetic light. This engagement with God in a realm of consciousness made divine is able to be expressed by the practitioners through the employment of allusive and figurative language, which is intended to be evocative and instructive, and which is designed to promote an elevated state of mind in the listener or reader.

ABBREVIATIONS

ĪPK *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* of Utpaladeva—Torella 2013

PH	*Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* of Kṣemarāja—Singh 1982
SL	*Saundaryalaharī*—Kuppuswami 1991
SpKāVṛ	*Spandakārikāvṛtti* of Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa—Dyczkowski 1994
SpVi	*Spandavivṛti* of Rājānaka Rāma—Dyczkowski 1994
ŚSū	*Śiva Sūtra*—Singh 1979
ŚSūV	*Śivasūtra Vimarśinī* of Kṣemarāja—Singh 1979
TĀ	*Tantrāloka* of Abhinavagupta—Dupuche 2003
VBh	*Vijñānabhairava*—Joo 2002

NOTES

1. I am grateful to the anonymous referee and the editors for their comments and guidance on improving this chapter.

2. Whether or not this correspondence is indicative of any historical contact or crossover between Jewish and Hindu mystical outlooks is not something I can directly address here. The cautionary remark by Charles Mopsik is pertinent, namely that the comparison between the two traditions of kabbalah and tantra is difficult since it is not possible, either in principle or practice, "to ignore or suspend the social and anthropological differences in order to somehow set free the concepts which could be compared" (1994, 241).

3. If the kabbalistic and tantric practitioner adopts a certain stance toward viewing the role of God, as it is represented in a numinous form by the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding, then it is a position that is inherently perspectival. It is no less the case for present day commentators, who have a perspective, and who would draw a correspondence between two old traditions; accordingly, it must be acknowledged that the attempt to find correspondences at this level is informed by the writer's prejudice. Be that as it may, I like to think that a mathematical metaphor is useful here. If kabbalah and tantra are two points in space, and the (phenomenological) distance to these points from the observer's position is known, then the distance between the two traditions can be found by a point of triangulation, which, in this case, is the idea of aesthetic realization. The distance—the perceived line of difference or resemblance—between the two point-traditions depends on the angle of interpretation, and shapes the triangle of recognition.

4. In the *Heikhalot Rabbati* and *Heikhalot Zutarti*, there are remarkable descriptions of the palatial divine, and of the sublime God that resides there, which is all bejeweled and garlanded with beautiful splendor (Davila 2013). The mystic could acknowledge the description of the paradisical world of the God of gods by the writer of the *Dīkṣottara*:

> [Śiva's] Bhuvana[-manifestations beginning] in order with the egg of Brahmā etc., appear in the form of a palace. The world (or palace) of the God of gods is made up of various jewels, divine, provided with incomparable virtues, adorned with *indranīla*sapphire,

*mahānīla*sapphire and silver, with pillars made of ruby, ornamented with various gems, beautified with celestial garlands, scents and furnishings, possessed of divine sovereignty. Knowing the world of the God of gods one attains to it (lit. "one is merged in it"). (quoted in Vasudeva 2004, 281–82)

5. The ten *sefirot* are more or less imperceptible emanations from the most high or transcendent God (Ein Sof), and are constituted as a hypostatic configuration that is homologized with the soul (mind and body) of the kabbalist. See Tishby 1989, 1:269–307. He opines that "[i]n this symbolic system the *sefirot* are seen as spiritual forces, as attributes of the soul"; moreover, they display "a spiritual pattern of categories, both of content and of character" (271). The psychological status of the *sefirot* is explicit in the ecstatic kabbalah pronounced by Abraham Abulafia (1240–91) (see Idel 1988, 146–53).

6. Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical citations refer to the Pritzker edition of the *Zohar* translated and annotated by Daniel C. Matt.

7. Bibliographic citations to tantric texts are referenced through the Abbreviations at the end of the chapter.

8. In his exposition of this sūtra, Dyczkowski writes: "According to Kṣemarājā this aphorism explains that the yogi who is absorbed in the dense mass of consciousness of his own nature is not merely suspended in his state of realisation, but is constantly rising for whatever he perceives lifts him up to still higher planes in a fresh wave of aesthetic delight (*camatkāra*)" (1992, 37–38). In his gloss on this verse Swami Lakshmanjoo writes that *vismaya* means "amazement completely filled with joy" (Hughes 2007, 44).

9. The thirty-six *tattva*s are the emergent categories of Paramaśiva (Supreme Śiva), which, as levels of reality, constitute the universe from Śiva down to earth, and which are inculcated as experiential factors in the human being. On the *tattva*s, see Singh 1979, xxi–xxviii. In the system of yoga taught in the foundation text of Kashmir Śaivism, the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, the seven different types of experient (*sapta-pramātṛ*) travel through the thirty-six *tattva*s by a five-fold cognitive process (see Vasudeva 2004, 145–233).

10. Compare the advice given by Rabbi Shim'on: "Here is a mystery for fathomers: One who wishes to set out on a journey should rise before dawn and gaze momentarily toward the east and he will see an apparition of letters striking the sky, one ascending, another descending. These are the sparkling of the letters with which heaven and earth were created" (*Zohar* 2:130b; Matt 2004–16, 5:216).

11. Hellner-Eshed writes: "The interchange of water and light can also be explained by the linguistic affinity in Aramaic between *nahora* (light) and *nahara* (river). The expression 'river of light' (*nahara di-nahora*) neatly illustrates this identity of the flowing of each" (2009, 274–5).

12. See Hellner-Eshed 2009, 229–51.

13. Hellner-Eshed writes that *no'am*, "pleasure" or "pleasantness," as used in the *Zohar* denotes a concept that is quite similar to the Hindu term *ānanda* (2009, 284).

14. In the *Zohar* the habitual place of food and eating takes on a mystical valence for the kabbalist as a means of transformation, as a partaking of heavenly food, and it is to be sated with the presence of God (see Hecker 2005).

15. Cited in Tishby 1989, 3:1142–45, with his explanatory annotations.

16. Interestingly, Abulafia utilized breathing techniques that are reminiscent of those used in Hindu Yoga (Idel 2011, 53). See, furthermore, Wolfson's remarks on this issue (2000, 204–5).

17. Abhinavagupta, who flourished around 975–1025 CE, was a major exegetical commentator on Kashmirian Śaiva tantra. He was also influentially involved in the field of aesthetics (Pollock 2016, 181–238), and indeed has been recognized "as the father of Indian aesthetics" (Rastogi 2013, 441).

18. The term *rasa* is of central importance in Indian aesthetics and especially relates to dramaturgy and poetics. There are conventionally understood to be eight *rasa*s, each of which is associated with a particular emotional state (*sthāyibhāva*). These sentiments comprise erotic rapture (*śṛṅgāra*), comedy (*hāsya*), compassion (*karuṇa*), fury (*raudra*), heroism (*vīra*), horror (*bhayānaka*), revulsion (*bībhatsa*), and astonishment (*adbhuta*). An additional *rasa* was admitted by Ānandavardhana, namely tranquility (*śānti*). The emotional enactment by the experiencer (participant or observer) is delightfully revealed and "tasted" as pleasurable. This aesthetic response was extended by some writers, for example Abhinavagupta, to the distilled experience of savoring the bliss of divine realization (see the informative discussion by Theodor 2016, 60–90).

19. The term "aesthetic" was invented in 1735 by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten to designate "the science of sensory cognition" or "the art of thinking beautifully" (Guyer 2014, 5). British and French commentators and writers in the eighteenth century referred to the consciousness of beauty as answering to a so-called judgment of taste, in regard to the perception of nature and art, and they were intrigued by how the sense of pleasure in beauty can be a universal response to an object.

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Chapter 11

On the AUM and the Tetragrammaton

Daniel Sperber

In this chapter we treat notions of divinity that arise from parallels between Hindu and Jewish mystical thinking. Specifically, we present the ways in which the Aum and the Tetragrammaton represent four rather than three elements of the divine, the fourth being ineffable, unutterable—the element of eternal silence.

ON THE TETRAGRAMMATON

The holiest name of God in Jewish thought is the four-letter, ineffable *tetragrammaton,* comprising the Hebrew letters: *Yod Heh Vav Heh*. This name represents the timelessness of God, who was—*H*ayah, who is *H*oveh, and who will be—*V*e-*Y*ihyeh. On Yom Kippur during the Temple period, upon entering the innermost sanctum of the Temple—the Holy of Holies, the high-priest would pronounce the *tetragrammaton* out loud, and all who heard him utter it would fall on their faces in prostration (Mishnah Yomah 6:2). Since that time, the *tetragrammaton* is not enunciated and, instead, is replaced by the term *Ha-Shem*, literally "The Name," which came to be used as the standard way of referring to "God" in the Jewish tradition.

It seems that only on special occasions, in times of trouble and need, the *tetragrammaton* could be pronounced in some alternative form, perhaps through a system of letter substitution, either a reversal or a code of some other sort. This is what we may deduce from a responsum of the Babylonian Rav Hai Gaon (939–1038), who, in the context of a lengthy discussion on "The Name" and its uses, writes:

> All our rabbis and ancestors forbid mentioning the explicit name in Babylonia. But when it is mentioned, it is only done in a transformed manner (*e'etk*—obscure Aramaicism), since it is transformed in its reading and pronunciation. This transformed Name is passed on [esoterically] from one to another. It is recited only in the *Kedushah* [a central prayer in Jewish liturgy], literally "Sanctification," (Nulman, 1996) and in times of trouble, but not in any [other] times. (Lewin 1931)

So even on those special occasions it was only pronounced in this "transformed manner." [1]

The Jewish *tetragrammaton* is said by the sages to represent *the middat ha-rahamim*, the aspect of Mercy. This is the aspect of God with which He, as it were, interfaces with humankind. For though the world was created through the aspect of [stern] Judgement—*middat ha-din*—represented by the name *Elohim* (Genesis 1:1–31), in His relationship to humanity it is coupled, as it were, with the divine aspect of Mercy (Genesis Rabba 33:3, Theodor-Albeck 308) without which humans, with all their frailty, could not survive. Hence, in Genesis 2 et seq., the names of God to be found are *Ha-Shem-Elohim* (Genesis Rabba 12,112–113).

One might well say that these two names or aspects represent two opposing cosmic forces, *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim*, in which confluence *middat ha-rahamim* prevails, in order to ensure the continued existence of the universe and humanity, which, as mentioned earlier, with all its frailties, could not survive absolute judgement (Idel 1998; Lamm 1998, Scholem, 1990).

But this name of Mercy, which is never pronounced, but substituted by the neutral *Ha-Shem*, literally meaning "The Name," is one which remains in silence. This element of silence seems to be indicated in the famous passage in the book of Kings (Kings 19:11–12), where Elijah the prophet is told:

> Go out and stand upon a mount before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed, and a great blast of wind which rent mountainside. . . . And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire *kol demamah dakah*, a thin voice of silence [and not "a still small voice," as in the authorized version] (Job 4:16).

So God "appears" to Elijah in a sort of ethereal garb of "silence."

Additionally, in Jewish mystical literature the tetragrammaton has special characteristics. Thus, Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (Venice 1593) in his *Reshit Hochmah* [*Gate of Love*], Chapter X writes:

> Whoever wishes to rejoice his soul must seclude himself for a part of the day and meditate on the grandeur of the letters of the Tetragrammaton . . . as it is said by King David, "I set the tetragrammaton before me always" (Psalm 16:8). . . .

> Therefore, by his meditation, upon the Tetragrammaton, the soul is enlightened . . . and rejoices . . . and thus is the degree of the Zaddikim [the Righteous] who cleave to the Tetragrammaton, so that even after their death they are considered to be alive, because of their cleaving to the Tetragrammaton.[2]

Thus, meditation upon The Name leads to enlightenment, and its pronunciation involves many sublime matters, so that whosoever does not take care when performing it endangers himself. And it is for this reason that the ancient masters concealed it. Only under exceptional circumstances, may it be intoned, such as when the messianic era has begun (Idel 1998, 101).

ON THE AUM

The holiest name of the transcendent and immanent, Ultimate Reality, Supreme Cosmic Spirit—Brahman in Hindu thought can be manifested as AUM, a sacred sound and a spiritual symbol. According to the *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad* 1:1:

> Aum, the word, is all this. A clear explanation of it is: All that is past, present and future is verily Aum. That which is beyond the triple conception of time, is also truly Aum.

There is then already a (partial) parallel with the Jewish *tetragrammaton*, which also reflects the timelessness of God, Who was, is, and will be.[3]

The *Upanishad* continues (1.2):

> All this is verily Brahman. This *Ātman* (meaning "self, soul," a philosophical concept common to all schools of Hindu philosophy) is Brahman. This Ātman has four quarters.

Swami Nikhilananda, in his edition of this *Upaniṣad* (Nikhilananda 1952) explains that:

> These four quarters correspond to the four *mātras* of Aum and the *amātra* of Aum. A, U and M are those three *mātras*. The fourth, which is known as *amātra*, or without a letter, has a corresponding letter or sound. This is *silence* or *ātman* corresponding to *turīya*. [Supreme reality, ibid. 1:7]. The idea of sound suggests the idea of soundlessness or silence from which the sound may be said to proceed.

In a way, AUM is also a *tetragrammaton*, with the last element being *amātra*, a non-element signifying silence, and un-enunciability.

The *Aum* (or *Om*) has, of course, a number of threefold associations. The three constituents represent the trinity or triad. It may be noted that the notion

in which there is a unity between "three" and "one" is also to be found in Jewish Kabbalistic sources, such as the classic passage in the Zohar (2:533):

> Hear, O Israel, *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai* is one. These three are one. How can the three Names be one? Only through the perception of faith: in the vision of the Holy Spirit, in the beholding of the hidden eye alone. The mystery of the audible voice is similar to this, for though it is one yet it consists of three elements, fire, air and water, which have, however, become one in the mystery of the voice. Even so it is with the mystery of the threefold Divine manifestations designated by *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai*—three modes which yet form one unity. This is the significance of the voice which man produces in the act of unification, when his intent is to unify all, from the Infinite (*Ein-Sof*) to the end of creation. This is the daily unification, the secret of which has been revealed in the holy spirit.

Admittedly, Yehuda Liebes in his *Studies in the Zohar* (1993, 140) sees this as an example of "Christian influence on the Zohar," and indeed that is the title of that section of his book (1993, 140–145). He further refers (1993, 229) us to Tishby (1989, 973) for another passage in Zohar 3:162a where the threefold unity is mentioned. He brings additional discussions of this concept in other medieval rabbinic sources, such as the *Shekel ha-Kodesh* of R. Avner of Burgos (Tishby 1989, 141–142), when "holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3) is also discussed in Scholem (1990).

This issue was already noted by Maurice Flüegel, in his *Philosophy, Qabbala and Vedanta* (1910, 50–51). Flüegel cites *Zohar* 3, 288b:

> The Ancient of Days has three heads. They are revealed in each other: first: secret, hidden *Wisdom*; above that is the *Holy Ancient One*; above that is the *Unknowable One*. None knows what he contains. He is above all conception. He is therefore called, for man, the *Non-Existing*, *Ain*.

These are the first three *Sefirot*,

> three lights radiating their light to the other *sefirot*, receiving it all from the same place. When the Ancient of Days reveals Himself, they are illustrated and all form one Unity. (Flüegel 290a)

These three principles are designated as:

> Father, mother and son; or wisdom (*hochmah*), intelligence (*binah*) and knowledge (*da'at*). (Flüegel 291a)

Elsewhere (Flüegel 246b) they are compared to:

> Thought (*mahshavah*), intelligence (*binah*), and speech (*dibur*), nevertheless, *all three are one.*

Thus, Flüegel concluded, "the formulas of trinity are often enough found in the Qabbala."

To the above we may add the Zoharic "*telat kishrei de-mehemnuta,*" found in *Zohar* 2:38a, and 3:36a, meaning something like "the three intertwining elements of divinity," which are "God, the Torah and Israel are [all] one"—*Kudsha-Berich-Hu, Oraita, ve-Yisrael Kula Hada* (Tishby 1975, 668–674). This phrase was used by the Sabbatians to justify their heterodox position. (Fischheimer 2011, 245–249).

Flüegel continues to examine the meaning of this trinitarian formula. He quotes R. Mosheh Cordovero's *Pardes Rimonim* (Koretz 1780, 55a), one of the premier commentaries on the *Zohar*, as follows:

> The three first Sephiroth, Crown, Wisdom and Intelligence, form one unity. The first is the knowledge, the second is the knowing one, and the third is the known thing. These three are different things in man; for in man is knowledge different from the subject of the knowledge which contains the object, and which object again is different from the subject. The terms here are: the thinking, the thinker and the thought of object. But God, who does not think anything outside of Himself, *since everything exists within Himself*, sees and knows but Himself; He knows and sees all that is. God is the type of all knowledge and of all beings. Thus the form (viz: the spiritual essence) of all existences in the universe is derived from the Sephiroth and that of the Sephiroth is contained in the Source whence they flow. On which he comments Now this is a pantheistic view of the universe: "Everything that exists, exists in God, and God thinks and sees nothing but what is in Himself."

He then compares this to Maimonides's *Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:9–10:

> All created things, the highest as the lowest, draw their existence from God's essence; hence He knowing Himself fully knows all that is. We, men, and our knowledge are different things. But as to God Himself, His knowledge and His being are all one and the same and absolutely identical. . . . He is the knowing subject, the known object and the knowledge; all three are one in Him. . . . Therefore, does He know the creatures not as we do, outside of ourselves, but because He knows Himself, He needs must know all, all being derived from Him. . . . Therefore, because He knows Himself, He knows all, because all derives from Him.[4]

While this lies beyond the scope of this study, it nevertheless illustrates certain structuralist parallelism in a variety and unrelated mystical and rationalistic (i.e., Maimonides) sources.

However, *trimūrti* (having the three forms) of Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva respectively, in turn, are associated with the three basic cosmic functions. Brahma, the equilibrium between the two opposing principles (the centripetal and the centrifugal forces), are represented by Śiva—disintegration or destruction, and Viṣṇu—preservation and renewal. It also consists of three syllables, *bhur*, *bhuvah*, and *svar*, which represent earth, atmosphere, and sky, that is, the cosmos. And though it is regarded as the one eternal syllable, and its utterance ensures the retaining of knowledge and counteracts errors in the performance of rituals, protecting the devotee against misfortune, and therefore prefixes prayers and recitations from the Veda, it must be uttered *sotto voce* for a variety of reasons. Here then, as in Jewish mystical sources, meditation upon this name leads to enlightenment.

But, as mentioned above, though it appears to be a *trigrammata*, a three-lettered name, there does exist the fourth ineffable, unutterable non-sound element of eternal silence, which makes up its *tetragrammatorial* character.

There are, therefore, certain parallels between the two Names: supra-temporality or timelessness, ineffability for a very selective utterance, and the cosmic significance of the balance of opposing forces.

We are not suggesting any kind of mutual influence in either direction, but rather structuralist parallelism that touches at the very heart of a certain type of religious (mystical) thinking. For super-temporality is beyond human conception, and even if we have words for this notion, it is really non-verbalizable. Cosmic balance, for its part, is something one may believe to be required for sustainable existence even without truly understanding its real nature. So the human psyche, whether in the East or the West, formulates its theological and ritualistic terminology in strangely parallel ways.

NOTES

1. See Green (1997) and his fascinating and extensive discussion on the possible periods and occasions during which the name might possibly be permitted to be pronounced (pp. 44–48). But even those speculative examples, at times based on textual emendation, such as pp. 44–45 note 12, seem to belong to somewhat obscure esoteric circles. On *e'etk*, see his note on p. 48 note 20, and editor's note on p. 23 note 1, for variant readings. See also I. Greenwald's (1994) discussion of the R. Hai text in a different context.

2. Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (Venice 1593) *Reshit Hochmah* [*Gate of Love*], Chapter X. See Idel (1988) pp. 50, 296, note 98, and see continuation ibid. and notes 99–100, when he interprets Psalm 32:1 as indicating that one should *sing* the divine name.

3. Incidentally, certain parallels between the Tetragrammaton and AUM were already noted by Bayley (1912).

4. For a commentary on these Maimonidean passages, and a comparison with his formulations in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:21) and his *Commentary to Mishnah Avot*, introduction to chapter 8, see Rabinowich (1990, 56-58). And for a comparison between his esoteric views and those of the Kabbalah, see Faur (1998, 3).

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Epilogue

Hindu-Jewish Encounters—Whence, Whither, and Why?

Theorizing Embodied Communities in the Academy and Beyond

Barbara A. Holdrege

I would like to begin my reflections on Hindu-Jewish encounters with a wager that up until recently few scholars or religious leaders would expect to find Jews and Hindus actively engaging with one another in some form of "Hindu-Jewish dialogue" or, for that matter, in any form of Hindu-Jewish encounter. This is due in part to two commonly held assumptions. First, Hindu and Jewish traditions have often been characterized as representing opposite ends of the spectrum of the world's religions. "Polytheistic," iconocentric Hindu traditions, with their panoply of deities enshrined in images, have generally been considered antithetical to "monotheistic," iconoclastic Jewish traditions, with their emphasis on the unity and transcendence of God and abhorrence of image-making practices. Second, in contrast to religious traditions that have had longstanding genealogical and historical connections, such as Jewish and Christian traditions or Hindu and Buddhist traditions, Hindu and Jewish communities have generally been deemed to have had little historical contact and, hence, there has been little impetus for these communities to enter into sustained mutual engagements prior to the modern period. However, in recent decades both of these assumptions have been challenged from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and there has been an upsurge of interest among scholars in the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish traditions and of Indic and Judaic cultures more broadly. The first assumption has been debunked because it perpetuates misleading stereotypical characterizations and fails to take into account the rich diversity of perspectives within each tradition as well as the significant structural affinities among the array of Hindu and Jewish traditions. The second assumption has been shown to be mistaken by recent studies that have brought to light evidence that Hindus and Jews have engaged in economic, cultural, and religious interactions for over two millennia within the broader matrices of Indic and Judaic cultures.

In this chapter I will begin by highlighting a number of landmark collaborative initiatives that have served to catalyze and sustain the burgeoning interest in Hindu-Jewish encounters both within and beyond the academy. I will then consider three kinds of encounters: (1) historical encounters between Indic and Judaic worlds within the broader context of South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures; (2) collaborative scholarly encounters between specialists in South Asia and Judaica engaging in comparative studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions; and (3) contemporary interreligious encounters between Hindu and Jewish leaders that—in contrast to the first two forms of encounter—conform to prevailing notions of interreligious dialogue.[1]

MAPPING HINDU-JEWISH ENCOUNTERS: LANDMARK COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

A number of landmark collaborative initiatives in the past two decades have sought to map different forms of Hindu-Jewish encounters. One of the pioneering initiatives arose in the religious studies arena and has focused on comparative studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions. A second type of initiative developed around the same time in the arena of cross-cultural area studies and has focused on comparative studies of the cultures of South Asia and the Middle East. A third form of initiative emerged soon thereafter and narrowed the focus to explorations of the historical interactions and structural affinities between Indic and Judaic worlds within the broader context of South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. Finally, a fourth type of initiative has found expression in recent years in a series of formal interreligious dialogues between Hindu and Jewish leaders designated as Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits.

With respect to comparative studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions, a pioneering volume in this area was the 1994 collection of essays edited by Hananya Goodman, *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism*, which represents one of the first serious efforts by a group of scholars of Judaica and South Asia to explore the historical connections and cross-cultural resonances between these religious traditions.[2] Another major milestone was the formation in 1995 of the Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Consultation, which my colleague Paul Morris and I co-founded as an experimental program unit in the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the flagship professional organization of scholars of religion. The Consultation provided the basis for the establishment in 1998 of the Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group as a regular program unit of the American Academy of Religion, which had as its mandate "to bring together specialists in South Asia and Judaica

to discuss topics within Hindu and Jewish traditions, with the intention of re-visioning categories and developing alternative models to the Protestant-based paradigms that have tended to dominate the academic study of religion" (Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group 2012). The work of scholars in the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms program units and other scholarly forums has found fruition in the establishment of a new subfield within religious studies dedicated to comparative studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions. This ongoing collaboration between scholars of South Asia and Judaica has inspired the publication of a number of important works. A significant milestone was the publication in 1999 of *Judaism and Asian Religions*, edited by Harold Kasimow, as a special issue of *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*. Such collections are complemented by monographs and edited volumes that interrogate and re-vision important analytical categories in the study of religion through sustained comparative historical studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions—for example, scripture (Holdrege 1996), sacrifice (McClymond 2008), hospitality (Bornet 2010), and food (Gross and Whitmore [2018]).[3] The present collection constitutes another important milestone in the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish traditions by bringing together scholars of South Asia and Judaica to illuminate the wide-ranging connections between Hindu and Jewish worlds in the domains of ritual, ethics, and theology.

The comparative study of Hindu and Jewish traditions as a subfield within religious studies has developed in close alliance with a second type of multidisciplinary initiative in the social sciences and humanities that seeks to foster a new form of *cross-cultural* area studies that goes beyond the traditional area studies approach and engages in comparative studies of the broader network of cultures in which Hindu and Jewish traditions are rooted: South Asia and the Middle East. A major milestone in this broader comparative project was the establishment in 1995, under the leadership of Gordon Newby, of the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies (MESAS) at Emory University, which is one of the few institutions in the United States to offer an undergraduate degree in Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies. MESAS, as a multidisciplinary department, "approaches the study of the region integrally, focusing on historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious continuities from the Ancient Mediterranean and Indo-Pakistani sub-continent, through the Islamic period up to the present day" (MESAS: Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies 2012). More recently, in 2001, my colleagues and I at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) inaugurated the Middle East and South Asia Comparative Studies Project to foster sustained comparative studies of the longstanding and multifaceted connections between the cultures of the Middle East and South Asia without privileging Europe as a partner in the comparison. These multidisciplinary collaborations have

generated a number of publications, including the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of the Middle East and South Asia*, edited by Gordon Newby.

A third form of collaborative initiative is concerned with the more circumscribed project of mapping the connections between Indic and Judaic worlds within the broader network of South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. A pivotal event was the inauguration in 1998 of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, edited by Nathan Katz and Braj Sinha, as an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to "analyzing the affinities and interactions between Indic and Judaic civilizations from ancient through contemporary times" (Katz and Sinha 1998). The journal includes comparative studies of Jewish and Indian religious and philosophical traditions; historical studies of economic and sociocultural links between Jewish and Indian communities; ethnographic studies of Jewish communities in India and Indian Jewish communities in Israel; theoretical analyses of images of Jews and Jewish religious traditions in Indian literature and images of Indians and Indian religious traditions in Jewish literature; studies of political and cultural connections between contemporary India and Israel; and explorations of issues in interreligious dialogue between Jewish and Indian religious communities. Building on the momentum of earlier initiatives, an international conference was convened at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies in 2002, which inspired the 2007 collection of essays *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Nathan Katz, Ranabir Chakravarti, Braj Sinha, and Shalva Weil, all of whom have assumed central roles in the development of Indo-Judaic studies. This collection advanced the emerging field of Indo-Judaic studies in significant ways by providing the first single-volume multidisciplinary investigation of the economic, cultural, religious, and political connections between Indic and Judaic cultures from ancient times to the present day. Another landmark study was the 2008 collection of essays *Karmic Passages: Israeli Scholarship on India*, edited by David Shulman and Shalva Weil. This volume, whose publication coincided with the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between India and Israel in 1992, provides a brief historical overview of Israeli scholarship on South Asia and then charts three types of Israeli encounters with India: philological and literary excursions by Israeli scholars into Indic languages and texts; Israeli scholars' explorations of Buddhist traditions from multiple perspectives; and sojourns in India by Israeli travelers and backpackers on a quest for spiritual transformation.[4]

A fourth type of initiative, which explicitly claims to have been inspired in part by the scholarly work of the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms program units, arose outside of the academy and has involved a series of formal interreligious dialogues between appointed delegations of Hindu and Jewish religious leaders, beginning in 2007. These Hindu-Jewish

Leadership Summits are described as "an initiative of the World Council of Religious Leaders in partnership with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha" (Report of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007). The first Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit was convened on February 5–7, 2007, in New Delhi, India, and was followed by a second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit on February 17–20, 2008, in Jerusalem, Israel. The stated goal of the first two summits was to "promote understanding and mutual respect between the Rabbinic leadership and the major religious leaders of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha," and each summit produced a formal declaration affirming the theological principles, value systems and practices, and social visions shared by Hindu and Jewish traditions (Declaration of the Second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2008).

HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS: SOUTH ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURES, INDIC AND JUDAIC WORLDS

Wilhelm Halbfass, in his study *India and Europe* (1988), explores the history of intellectual encounters between India and Europe from classical antiquity to the twentieth century. He concludes his study with a discussion of the "global predicament of Westernization" in the contemporary period, reflecting more specifically on the problems that the so-called "Europeanization of the earth" presents for both European and Indian partners in the "dialogue":

> Will the "Europeanization" of the earth be reversed? Are other cultures and traditions . . . ready to provide alternatives? In the modern planetary situation, Eastern and Western "cultures" . . . meet *in* a Westernized world, under conditions shaped by Western ways of thinking. The medium, the framework of any "dialogue" seems to be an irreducibly Western one. But is this factually inescapable "universality" the true *telos* of mankind? Could it be that the global openness of modernity is still a parochially Western, European horizon?[5] (Halbfass 1988, 440)

Halbfass's question lays bare the European—and more broadly, European-American—presumption that history's direction is toward a modern, universal, and essentially "Western" global culture—a presumption that is certainly not shared by all the players in the global drama of ideological, cultural, and political conflicts that is currently unfolding on the world's stage. To go beyond the "parochially Western, European horizon" of the "dialogue" among the world's cultures, we need to foster alternative forms of cross-cultural encounter in which Europe is not the privileged partner. Indeed,

what if we were to remove Europe as a principal partner in the encounter and to shift the dialogue from "India and Europe" to "South Asia and the Middle East," investigating the longstanding connections between these ancient cultural networks whose distinctive histories have unfolded outside of, inside of, and in spite of the West? In my work as a founding member of the UCSB Middle East and South Asia Comparative Studies Project, I have suggested that this type of comparative enterprise can serve as an important antidote to the epistemological hegemony of "Europeanization"—and its more recent counterpart, "Americanization"—by providing a multiplicity of different imaginaries that do not privilege "Western" idioms associated with the modernist project but are rather grounded in the indigenous idioms of the cultures of South Asia and the Middle East.

As a comparative historian of religions, I have emphasized the role of comparative study as a method of critical interrogation that can serve as a means to challenge and dismantle the tyranny of prevailing paradigms in the academy and to explore a range of alternative epistemologies. I have been concerned in particular with interrogating two related sets of paradigms that have assumed the status of dominant discourses in the human sciences in Europe and North America since the nineteenth century as part of the process of the "Europeanization of the earth": the *Eurocentric paradigms* that have dominated scholarship in the social sciences and humanities, including history, anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, geography, psychology, philosophy, religious studies, and literary studies; and the *Protestant Christian paradigms* that have dominated scholarship in religious studies more specifically. One of the important tasks of comparative study in this context is to challenge scholars to become critically self-conscious of the legacy of these dominant paradigms that lingers in our categories and taxonomies and to reconfigure our scholarly discourses to include a multiplicity of epistemic perspectives. Comparative studies of South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures—and of Indic and Judaic worlds within these cultural networks—can provide the basis for developing alternative epistemologies to the Eurocentric paradigms that have dominated scholarship in the social sciences and humanities. Within the domain of religious studies more specifically, as I will discuss in the following section, comparative studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions can provide the basis for developing alternative epistemologies to the Protestant-based paradigms that have dominated the academic study of religion.

Eurocentrism has its counterpart in orientalism and Christian missionizing projects, in which "Europe" or "the West" provides the implicit standard against which the "Rest of the World" and the "Rest of the Religions" are compared and evaluated. Thus, Western studies of South Asia and the Middle East have generally been undertaken, explicitly or implicitly, within

a comparative framework in which European conceptual categories provide the standard of comparison. This "European epistemological hegemony"[6] has served to legitimate and perpetuate colonial and neocolonial projects. Long after the period of decolonization, the "postcolonial predicament" of scholars in the social sciences and humanities has involved coming to terms with the legacy of this hegemonic discourse, which still prevails as an "internal Eurocentrism" and "internal orientalism" that operate—albeit unconsciously—in the representational strategies, categories, and practices of many scholars (see Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993).

Following the seminal critiques of Eurocentric ideology in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism* (1989), scholarship in the areas of world economic and social history and world-system analysis has challenged the dominant discourse of Eurocentrism on two fronts: first, through sustained critiques of prevailing social, economic, and geographic theories and the Eurocentric historiographies on which they are based; and, second, through extended analyses of the contributions of the "Rest of the World"—and in particular Asia and the Middle East—to the world-system before, during, and after the "European hegemony" that characterizes the modern period. One possible approach to generating new epistemologies, suggested by the work of Janet Abu-Lughod (1989), J. M. Blaut (1993), Andre Gunder Frank (1998), and other world-system theorists as well as global studies advocates, is to adopt a global perspective and to develop new categories and models through a comparative macrohistory of the contributions of the key players in the world-system in various historical periods.[7] A global studies approach provides an attractive alternative to the traditional area studies approach, with its orientalist legacy and historical roots in cold war strategic concerns.

The UCSB Middle East and South Asia Comparative Studies Project has fostered an approach that can serve to mediate between a global studies approach and the traditional area studies approach by engaging in a more circumscribed form of comparative study focused on two of the key cultural networks in the world-system before, during, and after European hegemony: South Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, rather than viewing South Asia and the Middle East from the perspective of these regions' precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial encounters with Europe, this comparative approach removes the European optic and gives priority instead to studying the historical connections and structural affinities between the cultures of South Asia and the Middle East directly, without privileging Europe as an explicit or implicit partner in the comparison. Comparative studies of the cultures of South Asia and the Middle East—including a consideration of economic, political, social, cultural, and religious connections—can contribute to our scholarly discourses in the social sciences and humanities by

generating a rich array of new categories and models that are grounded in the distinctive idioms of cultures that shared complexly interwoven histories long before the "rise of the West." My colleague Dwight Reynolds remarks concerning the significance of such comparative studies:

> Western scholarship on the Middle East and South Asia has been dominated almost entirely by discussions of the bilateral relationship of each of these regions to the West while ignoring questions about their relationship to each other. . . . The emergence of critical schools of thought, such as subaltern studies, postcolonial studies, and the overall critique of orientalism, have all attempted to rectify this dominant view, but even these schools of thought have generally restricted their focus to critiquing the "vertical" or "center-periphery" relationship between colonized and colonizers. They have for the most part ignored the potential for radically resituating that discourse through scrutiny of the "lateral" relationships that obtain among regions of the globe without triangulating that inquiry through Europe. . . . [T]here is a complex web of multifaceted historical connections linking these two regions [the Middle East and South Asia] that remains virtually ignored in western scholarship due to the overriding interest in studying how each of these regions has interacted with the West. To study the Middle East and South Asia without constant reference to the West is thus not only to study these regions from a perspective much closer to their own historical worldview, but also to explore territory almost untouched by western scholarship. (Reynolds 2001)

Abu-Lughod, as the keynote speaker at the inaugural symposium of the UCSB Middle East and South Asia Project in March 2001, emphasized the need for sustained comparative studies of the longstanding economic, social, cultural, and religious connections between the Middle East and South Asia. She also highlighted the potential contributions of such comparative studies in "de-center[ing] both traditional area studies and the ostensibly new field of globalization studies":

> The persistent connections between the Middle East and Asia cannot be overemphasized. Anyone with a deeper historical perspective would take these connections as an assumed "fact," since the existence of mini-world-systems, prior to the achievement of "western" dominance over both regions during the colonial period, is hardly a problematic to be explained. . . . [H]istory is written by the victor, [and therefore] for too long not only the world, but the description of it has been shaped by the dominant. This has led not only to distortions, but to a sad neglect of the study of ongoing connections between the Middle East and Asia. . . . (Abu-Lughod 2001)

Within the broader domain of Middle Eastern and South Asian studies, the mandate of Indo-Judaic studies, as a distinct multidisciplinary field of

scholarly inquiry, is to investigate more specifically the historical connections between Indic and Judaic worlds. I will briefly survey the fruits of this scholarly inquiry in two areas: (1) trade contacts and (2) cultural and religious encounters.

Trade Contacts

Ranabir Chakravarti (2001, 2007a, 2007b), an economic and social historian who specializes in the maritime trade of ancient and early medieval India, notes that studies of commercial and cultural exchanges between Indic and Judaic cultures have focused primarily on the early modern and modern periods and have not given sufficient attention to excavating the history of contacts between these ancient cultures prior to 1300 CE. To remedy this problem, he presents a historical reconstruction of Indo-Judaic trade contacts that spans more than two millennia, from 1000 BCE to 1300 CE, and highlights key moments that forged significant connections between Indian and Jewish communities (Chakravarti 2007b). He presents this historical reconstruction as part of the broader history of trade between South Asia and the Middle East, or West Asia, in which both Indian and Jewish merchants assumed pivotal roles:

> That India . . . has a cherished history of long-distance trade with West Asia, and the Near and the Middle East, is well known. The arterial routes of overland commerce through the northwestern borderlands of the subcontinent and the almost central position of the subcontinent in the Indian Ocean immensely facilitated India's overseas trade and contacts. The Land of Israel, in its turn, was a bridge between Asia and Africa. Egypt, which was well known for its Jewish population, acted as a hinge between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. (Chakravarti 2007b, 20)

Chakravarti, in his efforts to reconstruct the early history of trade contacts between Indian communities in South Asia and Jewish communities in Israel, Egypt, Babylonia, and other parts of the Middle East, builds on and extends the work of earlier scholars who have made significant contributions to Indo-Judaic studies in this arena, including Chaim Rabin (1971, 1994), Katz (1999), and Brian Weinstein (2000, 2001). In their respective contributions to this history, these scholars draw on philological, literary, historiographic, archival, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence from a diverse array of Indian, Jewish, Persian, Greek, Roman, Chinese, and Arabic sources. It is not possible within the scope of the present chapter to provide a full account of the evidence assembled by these scholars. I will rather limit my discussion to select examples of the evidence from Indian and Jewish sources.

Although Chakravarti presents some evidence from early Indian sources, he emphasizes that there is a major problem with these sources in that they employ the encompassing terms *Yavana* or *mleccha* to designate foreigners, irrespective of their ethnocultural identities, and they do not use any specific designation to refer to the Jews as a distinct ethnocultural community:

> The historian here faces a major problem: India occasionally figures in early Jewish sources, but no ancient Indian source categorically refers to the Jews. The Jews must have come under the encapsulating category of *Yavanas*, a term indiscriminately employed by early Indian writers, to denote the Greeks, Iranians, Scythians, Parthians, Huns, and Muslim communities alike. The Jews could also have been brought under the category of *mlecchas* (impure outsiders) in early Indian normative literature. In other words, it is difficult to establish a person's Jewish identity on the basis of Indian documentation which did not use any religious/ethnic label to refer to a Jew. (Chakravarti 2007b, 20)

The evidence from Indian sources includes references from early Buddhist texts such as the Bāveru Jātaka, which mentions periodic sea voyages by Indian merchants to the land of Bāveru, or Babylonia (Katz 1999, 14), a well-established center of Jewish life. The Indian evidence also includes seven Aramaic edicts from Afghanistan promulgated in the name of Aśoka (ca. 272–233 BCE), the acclaimed Buddhist ruler of the Maurya dynasty, which indicate that, as part of his mission to spread the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, beyond the Indian subcontinent to the Yavana rulers in Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, and elsewhere in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, he intended to extend his message to the speakers of Aramaic. Chakravarti suggests that "Asoka's messages of *Dhamma* and his use of Aramaic in the northwestern extremities of his empire could have reached the Hebrew-speaking Jewish communities of West Asia, especially those in Babylon, though at this moment that is only a plausible conjecture" (Chakravarti 2007b, 24).

With the rise of the Roman empire from the late first century BCE onward, the Roman world became connected to India via the celebrated Red Sea route, which, together with the discovery of the southwestern monsoon wind system, made it possible for merchants to travel from Berenike, a Red Sea port in Egypt, to Muziris (Cranganore), a port in Kerala on the Malabar coast, in forty days (Chakravarti 2007b, 27). The Romans subsequently established a colony at Muziris, which, as Katz notes, was a momentous event in the history of Indian Jewish communities in India:

> Having secured both the sea lanes of the spice trade, as well as the overland silk route, the Romans went on to establish their first permanent colony in India at Muziris, "the nearest mart in India" [according to the Roman scholar

> Pliny]. This is of particular interest to Jewish India, because Muziris was also the earliest Jewish settlement in India, known in the Jewish world as Shingly. (Katz 1999, 18)

Tamil works from South India provide corroborating evidence concerning the flourishing trade networks between Indian communities in South India and Yavanas from the Roman world. For example, the Tamil *caṅkam* anthology *Akanāṉūṟu* (ca. first to second century CE) speaks of the Yavanas arriving at the port of Muziris in large ships carrying gold and returning with shipments of pepper to their homelands. The Tamil national epic *Cilappatikāram* (ca. fifth century CE) describes wealthy Yavana merchants who spoke with strange tongues and who, having brought great ships filled with precious goods, left their homelands behind and settled in the capital city of the Cēras (Katz 1999, 19; Weinstein 2000, 26). Although the Tamil works do not specify the ethnocultural identity of these Yavana merchants, a number of later inscriptions, including two inscriptions on copper plates, indicate that by the tenth and eleventh centuries CE there were established networks of Jewish merchants along the western seaboard of India who were accorded important roles in the commercial and sociocultural life of port towns—in particular, Sanjan north of present-day Mumbai on the Konkan coast and Kottayam and Cochin in Kerala on the Malabar coast (Chakravarti 2007b, 31–32).

In addition to the evidence from Indian sources, a number of Jewish sources point to early trade connections between India—termed *Hōdû* in Hebrew[8]—and Jewish communities in the Middle East. The earliest source is the Hebrew Bible, which includes several verses, I Kings 9.26–28 and 10.22 (cf. II Chron. 8.17–18; 9.21), that refer to "the famous voyages of Solomon [tenth century BCE] to reach the land of Ophir from where gold, silver, ivory, peacocks, and apes were brought in Tarshish ships" (Chakravarti 2007b, 22). A number of scholars have suggested that Ophir, or Sophir, is a designation for an ancient center of commerce in India—more specifically, the well-known port of Suppara near present-day Mumbai, or Sauvira in the lower Indus Valley in the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent. This suggestion coincides with that of the Jewish historian Josephus (ca. 37–100 CE), who identifies "the land that was of old called Ophir" with India.[9] Moreover, philological evidence indicates that the Hebrew terms for ivory, apes, and peacocks in I Kings 10.22 (cf. II Chron. 9.21), along with terms for other articles of trade in the Hebrew Bible, are loanwords derived from Sanskrit or Tamil (Rabin 1994, 28–29; 1971). Further evidence of commercial transactions between Jewish and Indian communities is suggested by the numerous references in the Hebrew Bible and the Babylonian Talmud to certain spices and other commodities of Indian origin, indicating a demand for

Indian products that could only be procured through trade (Weinstein 2000, 18–24; Chakravarti 2007b, 29).[10]

The evidence from Jewish sources also includes references to India and Indian philosophers in the works of the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE), who belonged to an influential family of merchants and administrators that included his well-known nephew Marcus Julius Alexander, a wealthy merchant who appears to have been directly involved in the Roman empire's trade with India in the first century CE (see Chakravarti 2007b, 28–29; Weinstein 2000, 14). Although Philo's idealized representations of Indian philosophers may have been influenced in part by the Greek historian Megasthenes's account of Alexander of Macedon's encounter with Indian gymnosophists in the fourth century BCE, as Frances Schmidt (1994) has suggested, it is likely that he also learned about India and its sages directly from his own family members who were involved in commerce with India.

A critical source of evidence that demonstrates the pivotal role of Jewish merchants in the maritime trade with India in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE is the treasure trove of documents from the Cairo Geniza brought to light through the groundbreaking studies of S. D. Goiten (1967–1993, 1973; Goiten and Friedman 2007). Goiten's final work, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Goiten and Friedman 2007), which was completed in collaboration with Mordechai Friedman and published posthumously, contains translations of over 450 documents comprising letters written by medieval Jewish merchants engaged in trade with India along with other records such as commercial bills and shipping manifests. Many of these merchants lived in India for extended periods of time and formed alliances with Hindu and Muslim merchants, and this archive of letters is thus an invaluable resource for understanding the commercial, cultural, and religious exchanges between these Jewish "India traders" and their Hindu and Muslim counterparts.[11]

Cultural and Religious Encounters

This brief survey of Indian and Jewish sources provides tantalizing glimpses of key historical moments in which connections were forged between ancient and medieval Indic and Judaic worlds as part of the broader commercial networks that connected South Asia and the Middle East over the course of two millennia prior to 1300 CE. Moreover, the connections that were forged involved not only commercial transactions but also cultural and religious exchanges. The Jewish and Indian merchants who plied the sea lanes and overland routes between South Asia and the Middle East were not only the

transporters of material goods, they were also the transmitters of cultural and religious ideologies and practices:

> The very transactional nature of commerce would always foster the exchange of ideas, cultural norms, practices, and belief systems among the participants in that trade. Herein lies one of the most significant messages of the long history of Indo-Judaic contacts. . . . Merchants were not merely carriers of commodities, but were purveyors of cultural traits and ideas across long distances. (Chakravarti 2007b, 37, 38)

I would like to briefly consider three types of cultural and religious encounters between Jewish and Indian communities that were catalyzed in part by cross-cultural trade networks in ancient and medieval times: (1) cross-fertilization of knowledge systems; (2) perceptions of the other; and (3) settling of Jewish communities in India.

The first type of encounter between Jews and Hindus involves cross-fertilization of knowledge systems. As a result of the burgeoning interest in Indo-Judaic studies in recent years, a number of scholars, such as Weinstein (2007), have sought to illuminate the extent to which medieval Jewish discourses may have been directly or indirectly influenced by Hindu *śāstra*s, specialized knowledge systems, in the areas of mathematics, astronomy and astrology, medicine, linguistics, and other domains. However, there is a need for more in-depth inquiries into these and other areas of Hindu influence, as well as into the other side of this intellectual intercourse: the influence of Jewish discourses on Hindu *śāstra*s in various areas prior to the modern period.

The second type of encounter involves perceptions of the other—Jewish images of Hindus and Hindu images of Jews. In a recent essay Richard Marks (2007) provides a preliminary "history" of medieval Jewish perceptions of Hindus and Hindu traditions based on an examination of nineteen Jewish works from the tenth to fourteenth centuries representing a range of genres, including "a biblical commentary, a legal work, philosophy books, scientific treatises, histories and story collections, a Kabbalistic work, a travelogue, and alchemy texts" (Marks 2007, 58). He then raises important questions regarding the various sources of these Jewish images of Hindus as well as the implications of such images for constructions of Jewish identity. There are no comparable studies, to my knowledge, of Hindu perceptions of Jews and Jewish traditions in the medieval period. However, Yulia Egorova's recent studies (2006, 2007) provide illuminating analyses of Indian perceptions of Jews in the modern period in which she suggests that "it was due to the advance of British rule that the Indian discourse about the Jews first came into being" (Egorova 2006, 2). The Indian sources that she examines include

discourses of neo-Hindu reformers, such as Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), and Vivekananda (1863–1902), and discourses of Indian nationalists, such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) and M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948).

Egorova's analyses suggest that these neo-Hindu reformers and nationalists developed their perspectives on Jewish traditions as part of their distinctive reformulations of Hindu tradition-identity that were designed to counter European constructions of "religion" and more specifically Christian missionaries' critiques of Hindu traditions. For example, Vivekananda, as part of his response to Christian critiques, provides both positive and negative evaluations of Jewish traditions. On the one hand, he praises Hindus and Jews as both Asian peoples who are "the two races from which have originated all the great religions of the world" (Egorova 2007, 199). He affirms certain common features that Jewish and Hindu traditions share—in particular, their nonmissionizing character and consequent lack of interest in converting others, their basis in scriptures, and their systems of dietary regulations—and through this comparative venture he clearly intends to distinguish these *Ur* religions from their Christian and Buddhist offspring. On the other hand, as part of his response to Christian critiques of Hindu image worship, he criticizes the Jews as the ultimate source of this iconoclastic perspective and claims that they themselves practiced their own form of image worship by revering God's presence in the Ark (Egorova 2007, 199–200). In reflecting on Vivekananda's possible motivations for constructing Jewish traditions in this way, Egorova comments:

> Vivekananda's comparisons involving Judaism appear to have served two main purposes. The first one was to deflect the arguments of his Christian opponents. When Vivekananda finds some positive features in Judaism, he argues that Hinduism shares those features and stresses that Judaism and Christianity—which grew out of Judaism and was founded by a Jew—are Asian religions, like Hinduism, as only Asia could give birth to great prophets. . . . When he denounces Judaism, his critique seems to serve the purpose of showing the superiority of Indian religious culture. This way of constructing Judaism appears to stem from his general argument that Europeans—who were now practicing a religion that was an offshoot of Judaism—were spiritually inferior to the Indians despite the fact that their religion is Asian. (Egorova 2007, 201)

The third type of encounter between Jews and Hindus is the deepest and most transformative, for it involved transplanting Jewish cultural and religious traditions on Indian soil through the establishment of Jewish communities in India beginning in the first millennium CE. The study of Indian Jewish communities is central to Indo-Judaic studies, as evidenced in the proliferation of an extensive literature that focuses primarily on the

three principal communities: (1) the Cochin Jews of Kerala; (2) the Bene Israel of Maharashtra; and (3) the Baghdadi Jews of Calcutta (Kolkata) and Bombay (Mumbai).[12] "[T]hese two great and ancient civilizations, Indic and Judaic, interact within the very being of India's Jews," as Katz (2000, 3) has observed, and the study of Indian Jewish communities can thus serve as a means of understanding the distinctive strategies that they each have deployed in negotiating the Jewish and Indian poles of their respective identities. In his extended study of the three principal Indian Jewish communities, Katz (2000) emphasizes that, in contrast to Jews in other parts of the diaspora, Jews in India have experienced the benefits of acculturation in the larger Indian society without compromising their cultural and religious integrity through assimilation:

> A crucial distinction between India and the rest of the Diaspora . . . is that in India acculturation is not paid for in the currency of assimilation. By *acculturation* I mean fitting comfortably into a society while retaining one's own identity, whereas by *assimilation* I mean that the loss of that identity is a perceived condition for acceptance. The study of Indian Jewish communities demonstrates that in Indian culture an immigrant group gains status precisely by maintaining its own identity. (Katz 2000, 3)

This process of acculturation—as distinct from assimilation—is perhaps best exemplified by the case of the Cochin Jews. The oldest Jewish community in India, they claim to have arrived in Cranganore, a port in Kerala on the Malabar coast—which, as discussed earlier, was known in the Roman world as Muziris and in the Jewish world as Shingly—in 72 CE, two years after the Roman sack of Jerusalem and destruction of the Second Temple.[13] The community later moved to Cochin, where they were integrated into the sociocultural fabric of Indian life while at the same maintaining their distinctive ethnocultural and religious identity as Jews. One of the two copper plates with inscriptions mentioned earlier is from Cochin ca. 1000 CE, and the inscriptions indicate that the Jewish merchants of Cochin were granted major economic concessions and other privileges by the local king, which suggests that they were accorded a high social status in the broader Indian hierarchy. "Various privileges granted to them signal the status and prestige of the Jewish merchants at Cochin; the Jewish settlers appear to have been considered among the elite groups in the coastal society" (Chakravarti 2007b, 32).

In their ethnographic studies of the Cochin Jews, Katz and Ellen Goldberg (1990, 1993) use the concept of "foregrounding" to illuminate the mechanisms of acculturation through which the Cochin Jews successfully adapted to the dominant Hindu culture in Kerala. The Jewish community

secured a high place for themselves in the caste hierarchy of Kerala by aligning themselves with the lifestyles and practices of the two highest castes: the Nambudiri brahmins, the religious elite, and the Nāyars, the dominant caste politically and economically. This process of creative adaptation involved "foregrounding" certain aspects of Jewish practice—such as purity practices and liturgical symbols of royalty—that resonated with the Hindu symbol systems and practices of the brahmins and Nāyars:

> In their *minhagim* [local customs] the Cochin Jews have foregrounded the symbols of purity and nobility inherent in Judaism at the same time as they have adapted some of the priestly and royal symbols of Hinduism, making for one of the most exotic systems of Jewish observance found anywhere in the Diaspora. On the one hand, they have appropriated certain Brahmanical symbols of purity in their unique Passover observances. On the other hand, they have adapted aspects of the Nāyars' symbols of royalty and prosperity in their unique Simchat Torah observances as well as in their marriage customs. Moreover, they managed this syncretism judiciously so as not to contravene *halacha*.[14] (Katz and Goldberg 1990, 200–201)

COLLABORATIVE SCHOLARLY ENCOUNTERS: COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF HINDU AND JEWISH TRADITIONS

Studies of the intersections of Indic and Judaic worlds within the broader cultural networks of South Asia and the Middle East can thus serve to illuminate the neglected histories that have interconnected these ancient worlds and can also provide the basis for developing alternative epistemologies to the Eurocentric paradigms that have dominated scholarship in the social sciences and humanities. In addition to studies of the historical connections between Indic and Judaic worlds, another type of cross-cultural enterprise involves collaborative inquiries between scholars of South Asia and Judaica engaging in comparative studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions within a religious studies framework. Such studies can play an important role in dismantling European epistemological hegemony by providing alternative epistemologies to the Protestant-based paradigms that have dominated the academic study of religion and served to perpetuate the ideals of Enlightenment discourse and colonialist projects. Indeed, one of the express purposes of the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Consultation (1995 to 1997) and its successor, the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group (1998 to 2013), was to bring together specialists in South Asia and Judaica to engage in a series of sustained reflections on topics

within Hinduisms and Judaisms, with the intention of challenging scholars of religion to critically reassess the prevailing paradigms and to reconfigure our scholarly discourses to include a range of analytical models and categories arising out of case studies of Hindu and Jewish traditions.

The prevailing paradigms originated from a predominantly Protestant Christian elite in the European academy in the nineteenth century. The Christian—and more specifically Protestant—legacy of the academic study of religion is evident in the way in which these paradigms tend to privilege certain categories while marginalizing others, emphasizing a series of hierarchical dichotomies in which categories that accord with the Protestant ethos are given priority. This hierarchizing of categories can be seen in a number of persistent trends in religious studies scholarship: first, the tendency to emphasize the distinction between sacred and profane and, as a corollary of the separation of church and state, to compartmentalize religion as something distinct from culture; second, the tendency to define religion as a "belief system" and to give priority to categories such as faith, belief, doctrine, and theology while under-privileging the role of practice, ritual, and law; third, the tendency to give precedence to the individual over the community as the locus of religious life and consequently to give less emphasis to the social and cultural dimensions of religion; and, fourth, the tendency to define religious identity in terms that privilege universalism over particularism and, hence, reflect a missionizing model of religious tradition. While recent developments in the fields of ritual studies and cultural studies have provided important correctives to such tendencies, the Protestant legacy still lingers in the practices of many scholars of religion.[15]

The Protestant subtext of the dominant paradigms provides the implicit standard against which other religious traditions are compared and evaluated. While perhaps appropriate for the study of some religious traditions, such paradigms, together with the hierarchical taxonomies they perpetuate, become straitjackets when applied to other traditions. One of the tasks of the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish traditions—as articulated in our founding vision for the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Consultation and for the AAR Group that succeeded it—is to show how two of the world's major religious traditions defy the classificatory schemas associated with the dominant paradigms. These traditions construct other categories and taxonomies that bring to light different sets of relationships, such as those between religion and culture, ethnic identity and religious adherence, observance and nonobservance, and purity and impurity. Such relationships are obscured by the application of the prevailing models. In contrast to the Protestant-based paradigms, in which precedence is given to belief, doctrine, and theology, and tradition-identity is rooted in the universalizing values of missionizing traditions, Hindu and Jewish traditions provide

alternative models of religious tradition, in which priority is given to issues of practice, observance, and law, and tradition-identity is defined primarily in terms of particular ethnic and cultural categories that are tied to notions of blood descent.

The sessions sponsored annually by the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms program units between 1995 and 2013 engaged a wide spectrum of Hindu and Jewish traditions in a diverse array of configurations: biblical and Vedic traditions, brahmanical and rabbinic traditions, the esoteric traditions of Tantra and Kabbalah, *bhakti* and Ḥasidic movements, women's traditions, religious nationalisms in India and Israel, Hindu and Jewish diaspora communities, and so on.[16] Through our annual program of AAR sessions we sought to test, reassess, refine, deconstruct, and reconstitute a range of analytical categories that are critical to our scholarly inquiries in the study of religion. Two exempla will serve to illustrate the types of analytical categories and models addressed by the Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group and its predecessor, the Consultation. I will first consider a cluster of issues brought to light by the distinctive nature of Hindu and Jewish traditions as exemplars of a particular model of religious tradition that I term "embodied communities." I will then focus on the category of sacrifice to illustrate how analytical categories can be fruitfully reimagined through a comparative analysis of Hindu and Jewish instantiations of the category.

Embodied Communities

In my work as a comparative historian of religions, I have suggested that one way of rethinking what constitutes a religious tradition is to posit a spectrum in which religious traditions are mapped according to different degrees of ethnocultural specificity, with what I term "embodied communities" on one end of the spectrum and "missionizing traditions" on the other end. Among the array of Hinduisms and Judaisms, brahmanical Hinduism and rabbinic Judaism are paradigmatic embodied communities in that their notions of tradition-identity, in contrast to the universalizing tendencies of missionizing traditions, are embodied in the particularities of ethnocultural categories defined in relation to a particular people (Indo-Āryans, Jews), a particular sacred language (Sanskrit, Hebrew), a particular sacred land (India, Israel), a particular corpus of sacred texts (Veda, Torah), and a particular set of socio-cultural practices. Missionizing traditions such as Christian and Buddhist traditions, in contrast, construct their tradition-identities primarily in terms of universalizing teachings that are intended for potentially all peoples and cultures. In their early formative periods such missionizing traditions are generally concerned to disassociate themselves from identification with

a particular people-language-land-culture so that they can spread their teachings across ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and cultural boundaries, beyond a single constituency.[17]

My work suggests that—contrary to stereotypical characterizations of Hindu and Jewish traditions as representing opposite ends of the spectrum of the world's religions—brahmanical Hinduism and rabbinic Judaism constitute two species of the same genus of religious tradition: as *ethnocultural systems* concerned with issues of family, ethnic and cultural integrity, blood lineages, and the intergenerational transmission of traditions; as *elite textual communities* that have codified their norms in the form of scriptural canons transmitted in their respective sacred languages; and as *religions of orthopraxy* characterized by hereditary priesthoods and sacrificial traditions, comprehensive legal systems, complex dietary laws, and elaborate regulations concerning purity and impurity. The feature that underlies these shared characteristics is that of *embodiment*: embodiment in the particularities of ethnocultural identity tied to a specific people, language, and land and to an authorized set of sacred texts and sociocultural practices. These embodied communities share an abiding concern for the body as a site of central significance that is the vehicle for the maintenance of the social, cosmic, and divine orders. The body is the instrument of biological and sociocultural reproduction that is to be regulated through ritual and social duties, maintained in purity, sustained through proper diet, and reproduced through appropriate sexual relations. In their roles as "peoples of the body"[18] the brahmanical and rabbinic traditions provide the basis for constructing alternative models of religious tradition to the prevailing Protestant-based paradigms.

The AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms program units devoted a number of sessions to interrogating the distinctive nature of Hindu and Jewish traditions as embodied communities and to mapping Hindu and Jewish discourses of the body and associated regimens of bodily practices. We explored the multiform ways in which the human body has been represented, disciplined, regulated, and cultivated in the discursive representations and practices of a range of Hindu and Jewish traditions (1998, 2013). We also examined various constructions of divine embodiment (1998), and, in one of our later sessions, we were concerned more specifically with the ritual and meditative technologies through which human bodies are refashioned in the likeness of divine bodies (2012).

Our collaborative investigations included an examination of the modes of bodily practice—such as purity codes (1995), sexual disciplines (1996), hair practices and polemics (2007), and dietary regulations and transactions (1996, 2004, 2012)—through which the rabbinic and brahmanical traditions construct and maintain the particularized ethnocultural identities of their communities, circumscribing external boundaries that distinguish them from

gentiles and Yavanas, respectively, while at the same time delineating internal boundaries that establish socioreligious hierarchies within their own communities. Through these regimens of bodily practice, the biological bodies of those whose *ascribed identity* is Jewish or Hindu, by virtue of birth into a community that defines itself in terms of blood descent, are reconstituted as "religiously informed bodies" that are *inscribed* with the socioreligious taxonomies of their respective communities.[19]

Within the householder ideals upheld by rabbinic and brahmanical authorities, these bodily regimens assume the status of domesticized forms of asceticism, which challenge scholars to re-vision theories of asceticism from the perspective of these embodied communities. In accordance with this mandate, the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Consultation, in conjunction with the Ascetic Impulse in Religious Life and Thought Group, co-sponsored a session interrogating the analytical category of asceticism (1996). The session participants argued that the category of asceticism needs to be expanded beyond the confines of renunciant and monastic traditions to take into account disciplines of "domestic asceticism" promulgated by rabbinic and brahmanical authorities, including sexual disciplines, dietary restrictions, periodic fasting, purity practices, vows, and other forms of householder austerities. Through such regimens of domestic asceticism these "peoples of the body" ensure the biological and sociocultural reproduction of disciplined bodies adept at maintaining the distinctive ethnocultural identities and religious norms of their respective communities.

One of our later AAR sessions explored the ways in which Jews and Hindus in North America have reimagined their notions of ethnocultural identity in relation to modern discourses pertaining to the freighted categories "race" and "ethnicity" in the changing American landscape in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (2012). Although some scholars such as the historian David Hollinger (2006, 2011) have characterized contemporary American culture as "post-racial" and "post-ethnic," the session participants challenged such characterizations and raised critical issues regarding the persistent constitutive role of embodied notions of ethnocultural identity in shaping the social formations of Jews and Hindus in North America over against normative constructions of "Americanness" defined by Protestant religiosity and whiteness.

Sacrifice

The AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms program units sponsored a number of sessions that critically reassessed the analytical category of sacrifice through a cross-cultural examination of Hindu and Jewish instantiations of this category (1997, 2000, 2008). One of our AAR sessions

interrogated the prevailing theories of sacrifice in the academy (2000), with particular emphasis on the ways in which Vedic and Jewish sacrificial traditions—as two of the most extensive, sophisticated, and well-documented sacrificial systems in the world—challenge the models of sacrifice proposed by theorists such as Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1964), René Girard (1977), and Walter Burkert (1983). The session began with a critical analysis of the manner in which the scholarly projects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpreters of sacrifice in Indology and Judaica have perpetuated classificatory schemas that tend to privilege certain characterizations of sacrifice while relegating others to the periphery. The session centered on the work of Kathryn McClymond (2000), who, on the basis of her sustained studies of Vedic and Jewish sacrificial traditions, has challenged the dominant theories that represent sacrifice as a violent, bloody act and has proposed an alternative polythetic model of sacrifice that more adequately reflects the Vedic and Jewish cases.

One of the central contributions of this comparative investigation of Vedic and Jewish constructions of sacrifice—particularly as represented in the ongoing work of McClymond (2002, 2008) and my own work on Vedic ritual (1998b, 2001)—has been to call into question a number of assumptions that underlie the dominant theories. The first assumption is that animal sacrifice is the paradigmatic form of sacrifice, which is recast in a Christian discursive framework as finding fruition in the consummate atoning sacrifice: the immolation of Jesus Christ on the cross. The second assumption is that sacrifice involves the destruction of the offering—or the killing of the victim—and that the act of killing is the defining element of sacrifice. The third assumption, which follows from the first two, is that sacrifice can be equated with ritual violence. Ivan Strenski, in his review of studies of sacrifice in the 1990s, observes that "these days, the very concept of ritual violence seems to have been folded into that of sacrifice, making the two virtually identical. . . . This obsession with violence in studies of sacrifice shows little sign of diminishing" (Strenski 1996, 11).

The first phase of this comparative inquiry involves interrogating these assumptions and demonstrating that theories that characterize sacrifice as ritual violence, which are based on Western exempla in which bloody animal sacrifices are paradigmatic, are inadequate to account for the Vedic ritual tradition. First, animal sacrifices are not paradigmatic in the case of the Vedic *yajña*. Although the term *yajña* is generally translated as "sacrifice" by Western scholars, it is defined by the Vedic tradition itself as an offering (from the root *yaj*, "to offer, worship") of an oblation (*dravya*) to a deity (*devatā*). The Vedic *yajña* in its public form comprises the classical *śrauta* rituals that are traditionally divided into three principal classes, which are distinguished primarily by the material substances that are used

as oblations or offerings: the *iṣṭi*, which centers on rice or barley offerings; the *paśubandha*, which is characterized by animal offerings; and the Soma ritual, which centers on offerings of juice from the Soma plant. It is the Soma ritual—not the *paśubandha*, or animal sacrifice—that is given precedence in the Vedic tradition as the paradigmatic sacrifice that is the apex of the sacrificial hierarchy. Second, the destruction of the offering is not the defining characteristic of *śrauta* sacrifices but rather must be understood as only one among a number of interdependent activities that together constitute the syntax of Vedic ritual. Third, the destruction of the offering is framed in classical Vedic ritual texts as part of a carefully ordered ritual system that relegates the messy actualities of violence and blood to the world beyond the ritual enclosure.[20] In the case of the *paśubandha*, the destruction of the animal is characterized as "quietening" (root *śam*) and not as "killing" (root *han*), and the actual immolation is marginalized and domesticated in that it is performed outside the ritual enclosure and the animal is suffocated or strangled rather than decapitated, thus avoiding the inauspicious act of bloodletting. In the case of the Soma ritual, the paradigmatic Vedic sacrifice, the act of destruction involves the crushing and pressing of the Soma plant to extract the Soma juice that will be used as an oblation.

The first phase of this comparative inquiry, thus, leads to the conclusion that theories that imagine sacrifice as ritual violence involving the bloody slaying of a victim are not adequate to account for the multilayered significations of Vedic *śrauta* sacrifices. The second phase of the inquiry focuses on the Jewish sacrificial tradition and reimagines sacrifice, opening up hitherto unexplored dimensions, by juxtaposing Jewish constructions of sacrifice with Vedic constructions. In the Jewish sacrificial tradition, in contrast to the Vedic tradition, animals are the preferred offering substance in four of the five classes of offerings delineated in biblical and rabbinic texts: the *ʿōlāh* (burnt offering), the *ḥaṭṭāʾt* (sin offering or purification offering), the *šᵉlāmîm* (peace offering or well-being offering), and the *ʾāšām* (guilt offering or transgression offering). The fifth class of offerings comprises grain offerings, or *minḥāh*. As McClymond's work has emphasized, an investigation of the Jewish sacrificial tradition within a broader comparative framework that includes the Vedic sacrificial tradition brings to light a number of elements in the Jewish case that have previously received insufficient attention. First, as in Vedic *śrauta* sacrifices, vegetal offerings play a significant role in the Jewish sacrificial tradition—not only as a distinct class of offerings but also as an important component of animal sacrifices. Second, in the various classes of animal sacrifice, the killing of the animal is not the defining element of the sacrifice. As in the Vedic case, the destruction of the offering is not the *sine qua non* of the sacrifice but is rather one among a number of interrelated activities that together constitute the sacrificial matrix. Moreover, within the matrix

of animal sacrifice the critical elements that distinguish one class of animal sacrifice from the other are the procedures for manipulating the blood and the methods of dividing and distributing the portions of the animal—not the slaughtering procedures. Third, although the central importance of blood in the Jewish sacrificial tradition provides a counterpoint to the Vedic sacrificial tradition's abhorrence of blood, the juxtaposition of the two cases provides an opportunity for us to reevaluate the significance of blood in the Jewish case. If we shift our attention from the blood as a counterpart of the violent death of the animal to the blood as the "life-essence" of the animal, we open up fruitful avenues of comparative inquiry that point to the role of sacrificial rituals in providing access to various types of life-essence: the blood that is extracted from the animal in Jewish animal sacrifices, the breath that is extracted from the animal in the Vedic *paśubandha*, and the juice that is extracted from the Soma plant in Vedic Soma rituals (see McClymond 2002, 2008).

In addition to reimagining sacrifice through comparative investigations of Vedic and Jewish sacrificial traditions, in other AAR sessions (2000, 2008) the Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group explored the discursive strategies through which the category of sacrifice has been reinscribed in Hindu traditions and Jewish traditions following the decline of the Vedic *śrauta* rituals after 200 BCE and the discontinuation of the Jewish sacrificial rituals in 70 CE as a result of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Sacrifice has functioned in both Hindu and Jewish traditions as a "canonical category"—to use Brian K. Smith's term—"a category that acts to provide explanatory power, traditional legitimacy, and canonical authority" (1989, 202, 216–218). The category of sacrifice has operated in both traditions as an authoritative network of signifiers that, once divested of its delimited significations tied to a particular complex of ritual practices, has been mapped onto a variety of discursive domains, becoming invested with distinctive new significations in each domain. Through the discursive strategies of resignification sacrifice, as a canonical category, has been expanded beyond the circumscribed boundaries of the ancient Vedic and Jewish sacrificial rituals and has been used to valorize a diverse range of practices as legitimate new forms of sacrifice. For example, sacrifice has been variously resignified as internalized practices of meditation and fasting in the ascetic regimens of renunciants and householders, as scriptural recitation and study in brahmanical and rabbinic hermeneutics, as prayer and ritual worship in temple and synagogue liturgies, as hospitality rites and other domestic rituals in householder domains, and as esoteric meditative practices in tantric and kabbalistic traditions.[21]

One of the important tasks of the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish traditions, and of Indic and Judaic worlds more broadly, is, thus, to challenge scholars to critically interrogate the theories, models, and categories that

perpetuate the legacy of hegemonic paradigms in the academy—whether Eurocentric paradigms, Protestant Christian paradigms, or other dominant paradigms—and to reconstitute our scholarly discourses to allow for a multiplicity of epistemologies. Comparative analysis is not only intrinsic to the process through which categories and models are constructed and applied, but it can also serve as an important corrective to the scholarly practices through which certain categories and models are privileged over others in the social sciences and humanities and in religious studies more specifically.

INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS: HINDU-JEWISH DIALOGUE

The two Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits that met on February 5–7, 2007, in New Delhi and on February 17–20, 2008, in Jerusalem were historic events in that they were the first occasions on which appointed delegations of Hindu and Jewish religious leaders came together to engage in formal interreligious dialogue. The Hindu delegations to the two summits were convened under the auspices of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, an official group of Hindu leaders headed by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, while the Jewish delegations were convened under the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel led by Askenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel to visit India.[22]

When reviewing the reports and formal declarations associated with the two Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits, I was delighted to find a statement in the introduction to the first summit's report that "the American Academy of Religion has had a Comparative Studies in Hinduism and Judaism Unit to discuss topics in an alternative paradigm to the Protestant-based models that tend to dominate the academic study of religion" (Report of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007). I was heartened by the thought that the work of our AAR program units might have contributed in some way to these historic summits.

As initiatives of the World Council of Religious Leaders, the central goal of the two Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits was to promote mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between Hindu and Jewish leaders and their respective religious communities. The more specific objectives of the summits, as noted by Yudit Greenberg (2009), included both abstract long-term goals, such as promoting education, social justice, a healthy environment, and world peace, and more pragmatic immediate goals, such as combating religious violence and terrorism, countering the missionizing efforts of Christians and other religious groups, and fostering political, economic, and cultural ties between India and Israel:

> [O]bjectives included addressing the relevance of their respective spiritual teachings for contemporary society, focusing on justice, compassion, and humility; recognizing commonalities in values and social and religious conduct; working together to preserve tradition in an increasingly global and secular society; implementing both strong secular as well as religious education; and carrying out their mutual responsibility to those who suffer, to the environment, and to world peace. These spiritual and philosophical goals are long-term in nature. Participation in the Summit was also driven by more immediate and pragmatic considerations. The threat of terrorism and the challenge of missionary activity are common concerns of both groups. . . . Another mutually beneficial objective for the dialogues was the potential expansion of cultural and diplomatic ties between India and Israel. (Greenberg 2009, 28)

The participants in the two Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits, as reflected in the reports and formal declarations associated with the summits, emphasized the significant affinities between Hindu and Jewish traditions in terms of their notions of religious identity, value systems, scriptural traditions, and practices. With respect to Hindu and Jewish constructions of religious identity, the Declaration of the First Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit (2007) states:

- The religious identities of both Jewish and Hindu communities are related to components of Faith, Scripture, Peoplehood, Culture, Religious Practices, Land and Language.
- Hindus and Jews seek to maintain their respective heritage and pass it on to succeeding generations, while living in respectful relations with other communities.
- Neither seek to proselytize, nor undermine or replace in any way the religious identities of other faith communities.

These statements recall the formulations promulgated in our AAR scholarly forums concerning the embodied nature of brahmanical Hinduism and rabbinic Judaism: a notion of peoplehood that is defined in relation to a particular land, language, scriptural tradition, and system of religiocultural practices. The declaration emphasizes that, in contrast to missionizing traditions, these communities do not engage in proselytizing, but rather they maintain their distinctive ethnocultural and religious heritages by transmitting their traditions across generations through blood lineages. The participants in both summits expressed concern over the persistent missionizing efforts of other religious communities and emphasized that "they expect other communities to respect their religious identities and commitments, and condemn all activities that go against the sanctity of this mutual respect" (Declaration of the First Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007). In this context Chief Rabbi Metzger,

speaking of the long history of Jewish communities in India, thanked Hindu leaders for allowing Jews to live in peace in India for 2,000 years and for respecting their right to maintain their distinctive religiocultural practices without fear of persecution or forced conversion (Report of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007).

A number of the participants in the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits discussed more specific affinities between the constitutive components of their respective Hindu and Jewish religious identities: (1) their notions of peoplehood tied to a sacred land, India or Israel, that has found fruition in the modern period in the establishment of independent nation-states; (2) their revealed scriptures, Veda or Torah, that are preserved in their sacred languages, Sanskrit or Hebrew, and are interpreted through hermeneutics; and (3) their dharmic and halakhic injunctions pertaining to purity, diet, ritual observances, and ethical conduct (Report of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007).

In addition to highlighting the affinities between the value systems and practices of their respective communities, Hindu and Jewish leaders at both summits grappled with freighted theological issues concerning whether Hindu notions of divinity are "polytheistic" and whether their forms of worship constitute "idolatry."[23] After serious and sustained discussions, the Declaration of the First Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit (2007) concluded that both Hindu and Jewish traditions "teach Faith in One Supreme Being who is the Ultimate Reality . . . and who has communicated Divine ways of action for different peoples in different times and places." The Declaration of the Second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit (2008) went even further and asserted, "It is recognized that the One Supreme Being, both in its formless and manifest aspects, has been worshipped by Hindus over the millennia. This does not mean that Hindus worship 'gods' and 'idols.' The Hindu relates to only the One Supreme Being when he/she prays to a particular manifestation."[24]

These two historic Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits resulted in the creation of a Standing Committee on Hindu-Jewish Relations and a Hindu-Jewish Scholars Group and have been followed by a series of other meetings since 2008, including the International Hindu-Jewish Leadership Dialogue, which convened on June 14, 2009, in New York and was co-hosted by the American Jewish Committee, the Hindu American Foundation, and the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha. The most significant fruit of these interreligious encounters between Hindu and Jewish leaders is eloquently framed by Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee:

> Above all this meeting provided the opportunity . . . to shatter distorted stereotypes and misconceptions that all too often have contributed to keeping the

> Hindu and Jewish worlds apart. . . . [W]e were part of the beginning of a new historic era of understanding and cooperation between our two faith communities. (Cited in Greenberg 2009, 32)

NOTES

1. This chapter builds on my earlier reflections in Holdrege 2013a and 2013b.
2. Goodman's introduction provides a brief survey of previous studies that have attempted to delineate connections between Hindu and Jewish traditions.
3. See also Chatterjee 1997 for an illuminating analysis of a range of socio-political and religious issues addressed by modern Jewish and Hindu thinkers.
4. See also Weil 2004–2005. For an annotated bibliography of publications pertaining to the comparative study of Hindu and Jewish traditions and to the broader field of Indo-Judaic studies, see McClymond forthcoming.
5. In his use of the expression "Europeanization of the earth," Halbfass invokes both Husserl's discussion of the "Europeanization of all foreign parts of mankind" and Heidegger's reflections on the "complete Europeanization of the earth and of mankind." See Halbfass 1988, 167–170, 437, 439–442.
6. This expression derives from Pollock 1993, 114–115.
7. For an analysis of the contributions of Abu-Lughod 1989, Blaut 1993, Hodgson 1993, and Frank 1998, see Holdrege 2010.
8. The term *Hōdû* is derived from the Old Persian *Hind'u*, which in turn derives from *Sindhu*, the Sanskrit designation for the Indus River in the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent.
9. For relevant references, see Chakravarti 2007b, 22; Weinstein 2000, 17–18.
10. In addition to these biblical and Talmudic references to commodities of Indian origin, the Hebrew Bible explicitly mentions India (Hōdû) once, in Esther 1.1, while the Babylonian Talmud contains six explicit references to India (Weinstein 2000, 16–17).
11. For discussions of the critical importance of the Cairo Geniza archive of letters of Jewish merchants in illuminating "the stellar role of Jewish 'India traders' in commerce with India, especially sea-borne commerce," see Chakravarti 2007b, 33–38; Weinstein 2001. Both scholars wrote their respective articles before Goiten's final work, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza* (Goiten and Friedman 2007), was available in published form.
12. For an extended study of the three principal Indian Jewish communities, see Katz 2000. For reviews of scholarship on the Cochin Jews, Bene Israel, and Baghdadi Jews, respectively, see Johnson 2007, Weil 2007, and Roland 2007. For an annotated bibliography of publications on Indian Jewry from 1665 to 2005, see Katz 2013.
13. For a discussion of the origin narrative of the Cochin Jews, see Katz 1999. After surveying the evidence regarding historical links between India and Israel in the ancient world, Katz concludes that "the Cochin Jews' legend is entirely plausible" (1999, 7).

14. Once numbering around 2,500, most of the Cochin Jews emigrated to Israel after 1950, with only a few remaining on the Malabar coast today.

15. A number of scholars have raised issues concerning the persistence of Protestant presuppositions and categories in the academic study of religion. See, for example, Neusner 1986, 13–17; Schopen 1991. See also Staal's (1989, 387–419) more general critique of Western paradigms of religious tradition, which he argues are inappropriate for the study of Asian traditions.

16. The format for the sessions of the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms program units generally included presentations by South Asia specialists and by Judaica specialists, followed by a response that served to highlight the broader comparative implications of the presentations, especially with respect to their contributions to the re-visioning of certain analytical categories and models in the study of religion. We experimented with different formats, all of which were designed to foster collaborative research, including sessions with four complementary papers by specialists in the two traditions, sessions with two papers providing in-depth analyses of a particular theme, and sessions with a mix of comparative papers and joint presentations.

17. For a discussion of the distinctions between embodied communities and missionizing traditions, including a consideration of intermediary cases such as Islamic traditions, see Holdrege 1999. It is important to emphasize that in differentiating between embodied communities and missionizing traditions, I do not mean to suggest a hard dichotomy between mutually exclusive paradigms but rather a *spectrum*, with the ideal types "embodied particularism" and "disembodied universalism" at either end of the spectrum and a range of possible expressions of ethnocultural specificity in between. On the one hand, as the universalizing teachings of missionizing traditions are appropriated and adapted by different cultures, they of course become embedded in specific ethnocultural complexes and assume distinctive forms. Hence, among the varieties of "Christianities" and "Buddhisms," we find Spanish Catholics, Irish Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Chinese Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists, and so on. On the other hand, in the course of their history members of embodied communities may move from their homeland—whether through forced exile or voluntary emigration—and, while attempting to maintain their distinctive ethnocultural identity and their connection with the sacred language and sacred land of their people, at the same time adapt to their host cultures in a variety of different ways. Hence, in the long history of the Jewish diaspora, Jewish traditions have assumed variant forms as they have adapted to the local customs of different gentile cultures—as seen, for example, in the medieval period in the divergent traditions of the Sephardi communities of Spain and the Ashkenazi communities of France and Germany.

18. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz uses this designation for the Jews in his edited collection *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (1992). See also Boyarin 1993. For analyses of a range of Hindu discourses of the body, see Holdrege 1998a, 2008, 2015. For an extended study, see Holdrege forthcoming.

19. My notion of a "religiously informed body" draws on Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) notion of a "socially informed body" in which the sociocultural taxonomies of a particular social field are inscribed in the bodies of its constituent members through the "logic of practice."

20. Heesterman (1993), in his theory of Vedic ritual, posits a "preclassical" Indo-Aryan sacrifice that preceded the establishment of the "classical" Vedic *śrauta* ritual described in the Brāhmaṇas and Śrauta Sūtras. He is particularly concerned to elucidate the mechanisms through which the "agonistic" preclassical sacrifice, which was characterized by conflict, violence, and uncertainty, was transformed into the carefully regulated world of Vedic ritualism, which sought to establish an absolute order of perfect peace and stability within the ritual enclosure.

21. For a brief survey of the post-Vedic history of *yajña* as a canonical category in Hindu traditions, see Smith 1989, 202–218. Among relevant papers from our AAR sessions, see in particular Spinner 2000, Lubin 2000, Swartz 2000, and Bornet 2008, which examined a range of discursive strategies through which sacrifice has been resignified and "repackaged" in rabbinic and brahmanical traditions.

22. For the reports and declarations of the two summits, see Report of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007; Declaration of the First Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007; Report of the Second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2008; Declaration of the Second Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2008. For an illuminating analysis of how encounters between Hindus and Jews reconfigure the phenomenon of interreligious dialogue in distinctive ways, see Katz 2007.

23. At one of the culminating sessions of the AAR Comparative Studies in Hinduisms and Judaisms Group in 2013, Daniel Sperber, an eminent Professor of Talmud at Bar-Ilan University and participant in the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits, reflected on the theological issues with which Jewish and Hindu leaders grappled at the summits and presented key insights from his forthcoming book in which he provides a sustained legal inquiry into the halakhic status of brahmanical Hinduism, focusing in particular on the problem of idolatry. See Sperber 2013a, 2013b. See also Goshen-Gottstein's (2015, 2016) recent works reflecting on the theological fruits of Jewish encounters with Hindu traditions, with particular reference to the problem of idolatry.

24. For an analysis of the significance and implications of the two Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits, see Greenberg 2009.

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About the Contributors

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